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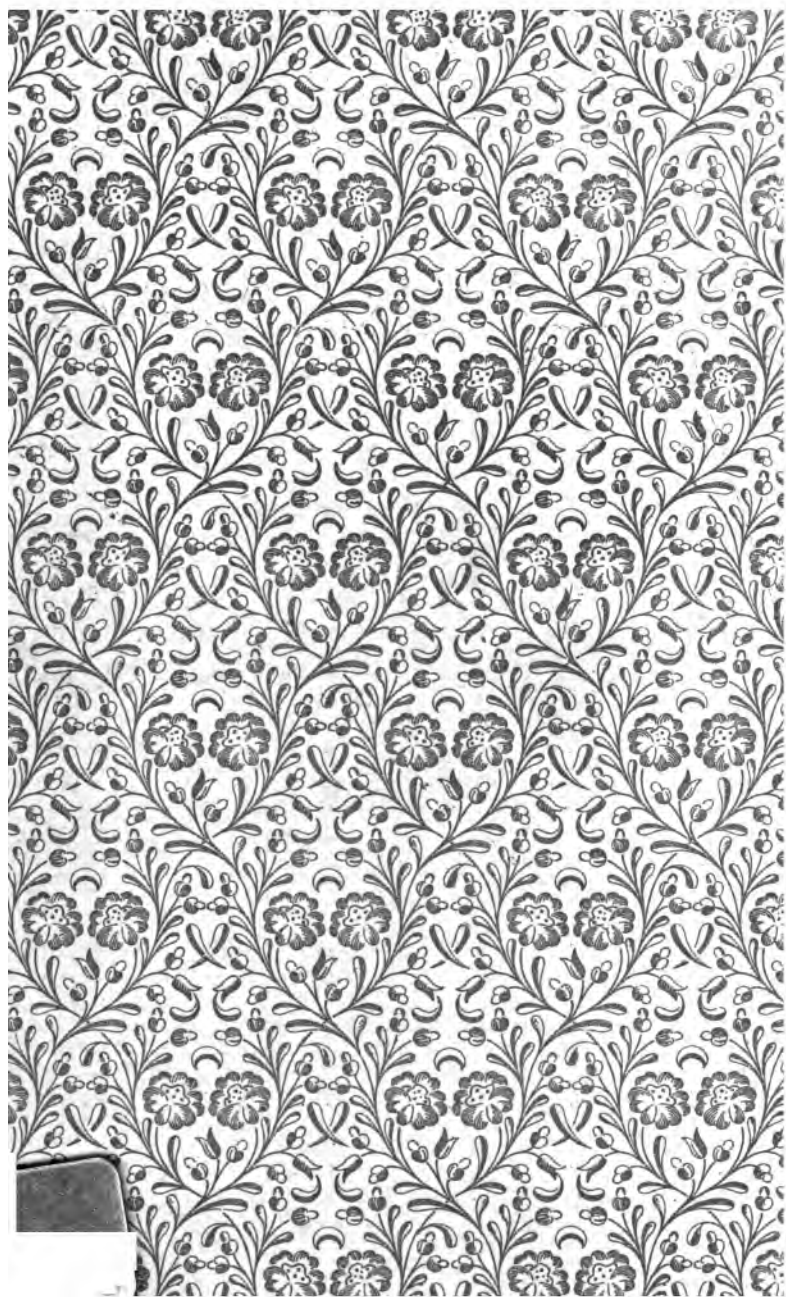
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THE LEADEN CASKET

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BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1880

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251. i. 72.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

THE
LEADEN CASKET.

CHAPTER I.

—but this is fixt

As are the roots of earth and base of all.

Man for the field, and woman for the hearth :

Man for the sword, and for the needle she :

Man with the head, and woman with the heart :

Man to command, and woman to obey ;

All else confusion.—TENNYSON.

DR. RICHARD CALVERLEY BROOKE, of 350, Harley Street, was driving home one fine May evening, and had all but reached his destination, when he received a considerable mental shock. He had been running his daily stage of duty since seven o'clock that morning, and now, worn out by this long strain on his clinical sagacity, was lying back in his brougham, when it stopped abruptly, checked by a little crowd collected outside his own door. Perceiving

where he was, he got out of his carriage with medical celerity, rapped vigorously at the knocker, and then, to beguile the time, turned to see what was going on in the street. His vantage-ground of five or six steps of elevation above the roadway enabled him to see an Italian organ-grinder, who was at one moment gesticulating wildly, and calling upon heaven, earth, and all around to witness that he had a right either to make music, or be paid to leave off; the next, playing a few frantic snatches of the street melody of the day; then stopping to gesticulate once more, and again dashing at the implement of music and whirling round the handle to prove that he meant to maintain his rights. But with whom was he disputing?—for all the dingy little knot of bystanders looked either stolidly indifferent, or merrily amused. Whilst Dr. Brooke was asking himself this, and watching the angry Italian, the dense crowd broke asunder, and then the second party in the dispute was made visible. This was an energetic, bright-eyed, and handsome little girl of eight; but that was not all, for she was Dr. Richard Brooke's own niece. He, after his

hard day's work, was coming home to rest and quiet, and the steady pursuit of respectability of appearance in his dismal brick house in this cynosure of medical eyes, Harley Street, and he was met by such a spectacle as this! He had only a few years ago gained the footing which he was now striving hard to keep—for who respects his doctor if he does not live in a good neighbourhood, pay one gentleman to open his door and another to drive that *sine quâ non*, his trim little brougham?—and all these things were difficult enough to keep, and the subtle aroma of respectability was ready enough to fly away from him, without the assistance of friends from within. Here was his own niece, who was to him as his own daughter, alone in the open street, standing amongst these ragamuffins, bareheaded, her hair thrown back in her excitement, and engaged in a warm contest with an organ-grinder! The child, finding that she was no longer penned in by the crowd, dashed up the steps to her uncle, who hastily glanced round at the windows near to see if the magnates of the street had witnessed this escapade, and then huddled her into the house as quickly

as he could the very moment that the door was opened. 'Olive, you naughty child!' cried he, 'what is the meaning of this?' And as the child did not speak quickly enough, he turned to the man-servant and said, 'And you John, I wonder you allow such things to be done; and your nurse, Olive, where is she?'

Olive looked too much afraid to answer. John spoke instead: 'I was out on an errand, sir, but I have not been away five minutes; and nurse, sir, has gone to the London Library for Mrs. Brooke, sir, for some books of reference.'

'But Olive,' said Dr. Brooke, turning impatiently from his man, 'I think you yourself, even if alone, might know better than to misconduct yourself so. What can have made you do such a thing?'

Olive, who was always a little beauty, but prettier than ever now, with her flashing eyes and bright colour, hung her head a moment, then, seeing her uncle throw himself down in a chair as if quite tired out with fatigue and mortification, she crept up to his side, laid her head on his shoulder, and said, 'I will tell you all about it, uncle; but please don't be angry

with me. I will never do it any more, so you know you need not be angry unless you like.'

She quite understood the nature of a perfect pardon, and her uncle saw that she did so, and said, 'Well, I won't be angry. I see that you will never do this again.'

'Never. But was I really so very naughty this time? Nurse was out, so I was with aunt upstairs, and she was writing, and thinking, and working so hard, and just then all at once that great nasty organ came and began to make its music, and Aunt Selina got cross with it, and at last she could not write at all. She tried ever so hard to go on, but it was of no use; she could not get a single thought up. So she threw down her pen and told me to go and order some one to send that horrid machine away, and to tell the man that if he did not move on quickly he should go to prison for a whole fortnight. But nurse was out, and Betsey was getting baby to sleep and scolded me for going near her, and John was out, and cook said she was not fit to go to the front door, and I couldn't find out where Agnes was, and I knew poor aunt was getting worse and

worse all the time ; so I just ran to the door myself, and opened it and peeped out, and there was no one outside then but the organ-man, and he did not look very cross ; so I went to him, and told him quite quietly that I liked his music myself, but that my aunt did not, and so he must be so good as to go away at once, for as long as he was there I was quite sure she could not get one good thought up. I did not say one word about putting him in prison—that might have been enough to vex him—but I never said it. Now, was I really naughty ? ’

Dr. Brooke kissed the anxious face which was now pressed so very near to his, and said, ‘ You should not have gone out, Olive ; but you promise me never to do it again. What did he say ? ’

‘ Oh, he got cross and noisy, and jumped about again, and I tried to explain that he could go somewhere else and play to persons who liked his kind of music ; and then all at once I found I was shut in by a crowd of rude strangers, who would not let me get out, and kept saying, “ Go it, little un ! Go it ! ” and then you came.’

‘By-the-bye, Olive, how was it that I found the house-door shut?’

‘I shut it after me by mistake,’ replied the child; ‘and if you had not come, I should never have got back until John, or some one belonging to the house, missed me and came, for I am not big enough to reach up to ring the bell.’

‘Poor little darling!’ he said, taking her in his arms. ‘You are a good little girl, after all. Tell me what you have been doing all day.’

‘I did some lessons in the morning with Miss Dawson, and then——’

‘Did you do them well?’

‘Yes, she said so—all but the sums, but I can’t do sums well, they seem as if they cracked me all over somehow! Let me give them up. Only, then I shall have no lessons. I don’t call the others lessons—I like them. After Miss Dawson went away, nurse and I and Alick and Lucy, we went out, but not for a real walk, you know, for nurse went to pay the books and buy things, and we never seemed to get out of shops of some kind or other all the time we were out, and then I had my dinner, and after

that a good read, and then this bad thing happened.'

'Never mind, Olive, I forgive you,' said Dr. Brooke, who could not bear to see her distressed face. 'What did you read?'

'I finished "The Mysteries of Udolpho." It is rather a ghostly, frightening book, isn't it, uncle? Now I want you to advise me whether I had better read "St. Clair of the Isles," "Fatherless Fanny," or "Humphrey Clinker." They all sound nice!'

'Good Heavens, child! What can your aunt be about?'

'You may always guess that,' replied Olive, mistaking him. 'She is writing—that's what auntie is always doing.'

'And leaving house and children to go to ruin,' thought Dr. Brooke, while he put Olive down and went to his wife's room upstairs.

It was a comfortable study, reclaimed from the bedroom department of the house, with a large writing-table in the middle of it, covered with masses of blue scribbling-paper, sheaves of pens, piles of manuscript. In a comfortable chair by this table sat Mrs. Brooke with hair

pushed back and pale face, looking, in fact, as people are apt to look after a hard day of writing. She had evidently been at it ever since breakfast, and she had not yet changed her morning dress, though dinner was nominally due in ten minutes. She was a handsome woman of thirty-eight or so, with a fine well-formed face whose only fault was the important part the forehead played in it. It was prominent and large, and all the hair was drawn off it, and Mrs. Brooke thought its size betokened intellect of a gigantic order, though her husband threw the whole weight of his professional experience into the maintenance of the opinion that the height of a forehead was no index to the amount of brains of its possessor. Mrs. Brooke was writing busily when he entered, and only said, 'Well, dear Richard, it is you, is it? If you have anything to say, I will speak to you in five minutes.'

'I want to talk now, Selina——'

'Not now—just wait one moment, or you will spoil one of my heroine's best speeches. I'll tell you about it. You remember the story? Well, her aunt, Mrs. Nettleship, has just heard

that Mr. Clement Disney—you remember that he is my hero, don't you?——'

'Tut, tut, tut, Selina, do let them all rest for one moment,' said Dr. Brooke; 'I must have a few words with you——'

'Can you not wait five minutes, or till the evening? that's better—I never write in the evening——'

'No, it must be now! I——'

'That is always the way!' murmured Mrs. Brooke; 'and then people wonder how it is that, whilst women claim to be the equals of men, they have never produced any geniuses of the first rank, just as if women ever had any chance of doing really good work! How can they produce good work? From early morning until late evening they have to give their minds to household matters of the most trivial and wearisome kind! No man would stand such a life for a day; but women have to endure it, and then, just as by hard thought and clever contrivance they have conquered one little half-hour for themselves and their work, and are sitting down to it quite delighted, in comes some servant with, "Oh, if you please,

mum, could I speak to you for one moment?" or, worse still, their own husbands demand five minutes' conversation! And I know, Richard—I am sure, it is something disagreeable that you want to talk about, and that ruins one's best thoughts so.'

'My dear love,' said Dr. Brooke, 'I could have said all I had to say in less time than you have taken over that long speech!'

'I never was diffuse, dear! You know that Mr. Chatterley's reader, when he returned my last novel to me, said that, though it was not quite what they liked to publish, still, the style was remarkably clear and pointed; and the reader for "Temple Bar" said the same thing.'

'I wish to Heaven,' cried Dr. Brooke, 'you would give up all this writing and go about your housekeeping as other people do.'

'As other people do! Now, Richard, isn't that just the least bit hard? If I were like other people, you might say that. But I did hope that you thought I was a little different—that I might do some good work some day.'

'Good work! Selina, you will drive me wild. Surely you must see that your work

ought to be keeping your house in order and looking after your children ? ’

‘ I do my very best with both house and children, not because such work is congenial to me, but because it is my duty ; but when all is well set a-going, Richard, surely I may have the time to myself which other women spend in visiting ? ’

There was some force in that argument, but then there must be some deficiency in Mrs. Brooke’s power of setting things well a-going.

‘ You should not send your nurses on errands when they ought to be attending to the children. They ought all to have been in the park this lovely afternoon—no wonder they look pale.’

‘ So they ought,’ replied Mrs. Brooke ; ‘ I must speak about that. It is not my fault that they were not, for they have my distinct orders to go out every afternoon when it is not raining ; and if Pritchard was out doing an errand for me, Betsey was in, and she ought to have taken them——’

‘ But you ought to go to your nursery and see for yourself that your servants obey you. You ought to——’

‘Now, dear Richard, you are talking just like a man! What comfort would you have if I was always running here and there to see if this or that servant was doing her duty? Do they any of them do their duty? Is it likely they should? But they do something towards it sometimes, if you only let them alone! They will not stand being looked after; they would all go away in a moment if I followed them about, as you seem to wish me to do. Mothers who are constantly in the nursery are always losing their nurses——’

‘But they generally keep their children,’ said Dr. Brooke drily; ‘and your first duty is to look after them.’

‘Richard, I do look after them.’

‘I found Olive alone in the street to-day wrangling with an organ-grinder! Do you call that looking after your children? Olive while with us is just as much our child as the rest of them. Is that respectable? I have a very hard up-hill fight, and am likely to have it, too, for some time to come; but I do my work as well as I can, and I think you ought to do yours.’

‘Now, Richard,’ said Mrs. Brooke, at last

laying down her pen, and looking at him as if touched to the heart, 'for once, dear, you are unjust. You could not have said a more unkind thing to me than that, for you must know that the only thing which keeps me slaving and toiling day after day at my writing in this way, is that I have such a strong wish to help you. I don't do it a bit out of vanity, or desire to shine; it is all for you. I know that you have a hard struggle, but if I could earn six or seven hundred a year—and most novel-writers who get on, earn far more than that—well, then, that would surely be helping you in the very best way I could.'

'If I might only choose what kind of help I should best like, it would be—well, looking after your house. Of course, dear,' he continued, for he was wretchedly uncomfortable at the very thought of giving her pain, 'it is very good and kind of you to try to help me, but——'

'Don't say but; be patient with me for a while. Mr. Chatterley would have taken my last novel, I know, and have given me something for it too, if only that horrible war had

not been going on. He said he could not publish anything that was not about the war, that nobody would read anything else; and somehow or other that is always the way with my MSS. He always seems to like them, but there is always something or other going on which prevents his venturing to publish what I send him. You see, imaginary convulsions of society—which are the things I attempt to depict—strike people as very tame in the midst of great national upheavals:—such as this war which is going on now,’ she added, for her husband was silent in wonder at her blindness as to the true nature of Mr. Chatterley’s polite excuses. ‘But I am all right now: this present novel will be ready to print by the time the war is over, and I am getting on so well with it! Sit down, Richard dear, and let me read you a capital bit I wrote this morning, it is not long.’

‘May I ask if we are going to have any dinner to-day, Selina? It is twenty minutes past——’

‘That is the worst of men,’ said Mrs. Brooke meditatively; ‘you can never take

them quite out of themselves. I don't believe there is a man in all England capable of forgetting his dinner hour, or that he has a stomach, let one read what one will to him !'

'By George, no ! I should think not,' said her husband heartily.

'I know,' said Mrs. Brooke mournfully, 'I know ; but never mind, dear ; it does not stop my loving you.'

'Well, I am going to my dinner,' said Dr. Brooke, for he saw that he had no chance of getting any talk with his wife while all her MSS. were lying about.

After dinner was over, Dr. Brooke approached the subject next his heart, and said in the most direct manner, 'I wish to inform you, Selina, that when I came home to dinner to-day, your niece Olive, whom I look on as my own child, was in the street battling with a disreputable Italian organ-grinder.' He purposely exaggerated slightly for the sake of inducing his wife to lend her ears.

'How odd of you to say, "whom I look on as my daughter" ! Don't I look on her as my daughter too ? And could anyone be more

anxious than I am to bring up that child well? I am far more careful about the management of Olive than I should be if she were really my own. You see, I know so well what stupid, silly, fidgety people her poor dear father and mother are;—so particular about trifles and appearances and that kind of nonsense! And she was out in the street, you say? Well, all I can say is, that she was a very naughty girl.'

'And all the windows were crowded with people looking on at the Brooke family disgracing themselves, and thinking we must be the queerest people in London! Why, I would not have had such a thing happen on any account! It is enough to ruin my practice!'

'Perhaps she had better go to school,' said Mrs. Brooke thoughtfully.

'You know my opinion of schools,' growled the doctor.

'Well, could she not go out in the carriage with you sometimes?' asked the lady; 'that would do her good and keep her quiet.'

'Do you remember my taking her out once, and she wetted little bits of paper, and stuck

them all over the carriage windows while I was with a patient ? ’

‘ I can’t think what makes her so different from other children,’ murmured Mrs. Brooke.

‘ Most people would say that it was because she has no one to look after her.’

‘ Really, Richard, how you talk ! It is not my fault that her parents live in India : I do my very best to supply their place. Did I not bring her here into my room to-day—just when I was writing a critical bit too ? And I let her sit reading in a corner by the window for a couple of hours, until that unfortunate organ came.’

‘ Reading ! What was she reading ? ’ cried Dr. Brooke, who remembered another grievance.

‘ Well, dear, I hardly know ; she was quiet, and that is the main thing ; and as for books, she likes best to choose them for herself.’

‘ And she chose “ The Mysteries of Udolpho ” and “ Humphrey Clinker ” ! ’

‘ Dear me ! poor child, did she ? If she could only read writing quickly, I am sure she should read my manuscript.’

‘ Selina, my dear, you are a fool ! You

really are, to talk in that way ; and unless you mean to change very much, and devote yourself henceforth to the children, I must at any rate take Olive from you. I can't help your ruining your own children, but I cannot let you ruin Chesterfield's.'

'Where would you send her?' inquired Mrs. Brooke very calmly ; she knew that her intellect was quite above suspicion, and was therefore not in the least offended by her husband calling her a fool.

'To my mother and sister. I have no doubt they would take her ; but if you have the heart of a woman, you won't let her go.'

'I do love the child, I love her dearly, and should hate to part with her.'

'Keep her at home, then, and look after her.'

'But one has to make great sacrifices for art.'

Dr. Brooke's lip curled a little.

'Well, give me a little time to think it over,' said Mrs. Brooke, and a silence of about an hour ensued. Then she said, 'If you think the dear child would be happy at Austerfield with

your mother and sister, she had better go—not for long, of course, but for six months or so, until I get this novel, which I am busy with, out of my hands—for really, Richard, I should not be happy if I gave it up. You see, I have been buoying myself up so with the idea of coming to your room some morning and handing you a cheque for a thousand pounds all earned by my own work. Oh! I should be so proud that day; and you know yourself that many a woman earns quite as much as that just by one book, so why should not I?’

‘Do as you think best,’ said Dr. Brooke rather roughly, for he did not at all want to lose sight of the child. ‘You shall have your own way, but it seems to me that you are turning your back upon a plain duty and pursuing a shadow.’

‘I wonder whether he would change his opinion at all if I quoted Plato, and he found he was on my side,’ thought Mrs. Brooke, who for the last minute had been repeating to herself a bit from *Lysis* which seemed to suit the situation :—‘The education of children of great men is often neglected; indeed, if people are to

be great, they can only attend to their own development.'

Judging by Dr. Brooke's next speech, he would perhaps hardly have included his wife under the category of great, for he began to make an apparently irrelevant inquiry as to the price that could be got at the paper works for a ton of old writing-paper.

After a while Mrs. Brooke persuaded her husband to listen to a long chapter fresh from her pen that very day. It was part of a tissue of troubles, each and all of which would have faded away if any of the actors in the story could have brought themselves to speak two words of common sense—only, if they had done so, what would have become of the poor lady's plot? Dr. Brooke did not want her to write novels, so he listened in patient weariness. Great was his weariness, but great also were the recuperative efforts of nature in his favour : very soon he was fast asleep. His escape into dreamland was never discovered, for just as Mrs. Brooke was about to look up to see whether her husband's face was illumined with interest they were both alarmed by a succession of agonized shrieks

from the night nursery. They ran up in all haste, and there they found Olive, who, having used all the time which they had spent in dining, in reading 'Melmoth the Wanderer' by the light of the drawing-room fire, had worked herself up into such a state of excitement and terror that she refused to be left alone even for a moment.

'This decides me,' said Dr. Brooke, after they had succeeded in pacifying her; 'that child shall go to Austerfield by the first train on Monday morning. I'll take her there myself. After all, my own children, poor things, won't take much harm if they are neglected a little longer, but Olive is just at the very age to be ruined for life.'

And here we may as well inform the reader that Olive was the eldest child of Sir Chesterfield Brooke, a distinguished Indian officer, who was now at his post as governor of a frontier province, and continually occupied in repelling petty insurrections and incursions. Olive had never been in India, and could not remember ever having seen her father. She had been left in England as too delicate for the journey, and,

having thus missed the chance of spending the early years of her life in that country, was now condemned to wait for a sight of her father and mother until she grew old enough to bear the Indian climate, or Sir Chesterfield resigned his appointment and came home.

To Olive these Indian parents were vague abstractions. The father and mother she knew and loved lived in Harley Street, and though she counted off on her fingers the names of 'sisters Amabel, Evelyn, Josephine, and Joanna, who live thousands and thousands of miles away from me,' the mention of their names and of the miles which parted her from them only made her open wide her eyes—not her heart—that was given to the unruly Alick and to the Lucy and baby who were always crying in Harley Street.

CHAPTER II.

Nor did he give them teachers, but they were allowed to wander at their own free will in a sort of hope that they would light on virtue of their own accord.—PROTAGORAS.

WHEN Monday came, Dr. Brooke found that it was quite impossible for him to leave town, so little Olive was sent down to Austerfield with a servant, and he was obliged to content himself with embodying in a long letter all the prohibitions and ordinances which he had devised for the child's governance. This letter was addressed to his elder sister, Miss Lettice Brooke, who lived with her infirm father and mother in this far-away Yorkshire village, and was the person most likely to have the management of his little niece. He wished Olive to learn a few simple lessons, to read a few childish books—which, from his recollection of the bookshelves of his youth, he had no difficulty in

specifying,—and to run about the Grange gardens and fields in happy healthful freedom. All the novel-reading which had been so hurtful was henceforth to be rigorously denied her. No late hours were to be permitted, her life was to be entirely simple, her mind was to be stimulated only as a child's mind should be, by Nature's daily show of wonders; and if hereafter she never did anything beyond trying to understand these, and in some degree succeeded, Dr. Brooke asked for no other learning for her and believed that her own father also would feel that she had enough. He did not hesitate to confide to his sister his reasons for removing Olive from her aunt's care, and as he knew Miss Lettice's easy-going indulgent character, he made a great point of telling her how seriously harmful Olive's course of reading had been both to her mind and body. He declared that he really believed that they should have lost the child, if she had been allowed to go on in the same way much longer, and threw himself on Miss Lettice's mercy, and relied on her love and affection, and extorted a promise from her besides, to watch over her

charge most carefully, and see that she read no such books for the future. Miss Lettice replied at once, and even went beyond the doctor in her condemnation of all that he condemned. Her dear brother might rely on her constant watchfulness and care. Novels were most improper and dangerous things for children—indeed, as for that matter, for grown-up people too. There was no one who would not be the better for letting them alone, and her dear brother might trust her to obey him in this as in everything else.

Dr. Brooke did trust her, and Olive went and arrived at her grandfather's house late in the evening, when the air was golden with sunset. She saw the pretty old Grange which was now to be her home, with eyes full of amazement. It looked strange after the dingy magnificence of London. It was a handsome old house in its way ; and had belonged to the Brooke family for centuries, but it was low and unlike anything she had ever seen before. There were only two tiers of rooms in all, and the windows were rather small and half-hidden by Jargonelle pear-trees ; the purply-grey roof

was diversified by splendid patches of yellow stone-crop and house-leek, and here and there a tuft of wall-flowers, or crimson snapdragons. It was a dignified-looking abode, and the rooms were large and picturesque ; but Olive wondered at its want of height, and felt sure that there was some mistake about it, for the stairs were so short that you were at the top of the house before you seemed to have begun to go up. She was met by a pretty, pleasant old lady who told her that she was her Aunt Lettice, and taken into a room where her grandfather and grandmother were sitting. They looked much older than anyone whom Olive had ever seen before, but the long journey had dulled her powers of astonishment, and she made no opposition to the general dictum that bed was by far the best place for her. She was conducted to the spare room, and, lost in depths of downy feathers, soon folded eyes and limbs to rest.

When she awoke next morning, the birds were singing in the pear-tree which was trained round her window, the lately formed brownish-red pears looked pertly full of promise ; the

sun was shining on the branching pines which composed the pattern of the chintz of which the hangings of her bed were made—pines on which blue-grey parroquets were perched at measured intervals, some in grave, ruminating discontent, some with inquisitive necks stretched to watch other birds like themselves fluttering down to settle on the branch by their side. Such movement was there amongst these—such life, such expectation, and all for an object which to the end of time would be unattainable! ‘Stupid birds!’ thought Olive in her own childish language, ‘how I wish you would get flown! Making such a fuss, and never getting one bit nearer the place you want to go to! I don’t like you, I like the quiet settled ones best.’ And then she remembered that restful and restless birds had alike been fixed and woven into the web where their part was to be played, and began to wonder if she, too, were so made that she could but do her work in life according to the instincts with which she had been born, and use the measure of power which had from the beginning been meted out to her. They called her naughty at home in

Harley Street, and little Alick her cousin, good, because she sometimes got out of bed and stole to an upstairs window to see the sun rise, and caught cold, while Alick refused to go when she summoned him, and quietly stayed in bed.

‘But,’ thought she, ‘I want to see sunrises so much that when the sky looks pink I seem as if I must go where I can see more of it, and Alick is different; he cares nothing about them.’

Olive’s attempts to do her part towards solving the problems of ‘fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,’ might have ended in giving her a bad headache if she had not suddenly caught sight of a large glass-doored book-case which nearly filled the entire side of the room. Large as it was, it was crowded from base to summit with books. Joy filled her heart, and she was out of bed in a moment to read their names. Their names! It was a novel-reader’s paradise! There was scarcely a single book in the whole collection which she did not long to devour. Their mere titles were a feast in themselves: ‘Cœlebs in Search of a Wife;’ ‘The Romance of the Forest;’ ‘Man-

frone, the One-handed Monk' (these, alas! on a very high shelf); 'The Pirate;,' 'Zealeuco;,' 'The Red Rover,' and 'The Water Witch.' Swift as thought, she got a chair, opened the glass door, took out an old calf-bound volume with an attractive name, and began to enjoy the pictures in it. One represented an affrighted maiden overhearing a villain of most repulsive appearance make a confession of some past act of wickedness to an equally unpleasant-looking companion. The eyes of the latter were starting from his head at the magnitude of the crime which had just been revealed to him. Thus ran the fragment of the novel which had been extracted to explain the illustration: 'Ela listened and heard the monk exclaim, "Thou indeed didst steal the son, but this, this is the daring hand which administered the fatal draught to the father."' 'Ah!' sighed Olive, but her sigh was but a long-drawn-out expression of content—a feeding by anticipation on the sweets of that volume. Her next impulse was to begin at once to read, but even at the tender age of eight and a half, the little maiden had attained to the degree of experience which

prompted the exclamation, 'If they have got so far as to tell that, this must be the third volume.' So she began to look for the first.

Suddenly she felt an arm put round her and a kiss on her cheek, and heard a kind voice say, 'But, Olive, you ought not to be standing about in your night-dress; and none of these are suitable books for you.'

'Aren't they, Aunt Lettice?' said Olive, with a face full of distress. 'Oh, dear! What a pity!'

When Miss Lettice saw the change which had come over the child's face, her soft heart was touched in a moment. 'Well,' said she, 'perhaps I might find one or two amongst them which you may read. Don't be so anxious, dear child; I'll look and tell you. Did your uncle say anything to you about what books you were to read?'

'He said I was not to read anything without asking your permission, and, Aunt Lettice, I am very sorry, but I am afraid I forgot. I was just going to read this when you came in——'

'But you will keep your promise, Olive?' inquired Miss Lettice appealingly.

‘Of course I will. Even if I hadn’t made a promise, I wouldn’t do anything to vex uncle if I could help it—no, not for the world!’ And Olive stoutly replaced the book which had tempted her so much. Still, she could not take her eyes off it. Suddenly she cried eagerly, ‘But, Aunt Lettice, you will tell me, won’t you, what other things Ela heard those two men say to each other while she was listening, and what she did about it when she got away? It is not very safe for her to be so near them as she is. I should not like it. I suppose she is not afraid, and that that is what makes her fit to be a heroine.’ And Olive sighed over her own shortcomings.

‘It is all a pack of lies!’ cried Miss Lettice with great decision. ‘Olive, I could not tell you the story of that book if I tried for ever. I would if I could, but I always forget what I read, an hour after I have shut the book.’ This was an assertion which Miss Lettice was in the habit of making. It served her as an excuse for never opening any book which was not a novel. ‘It was so disrespectful,’ she said,

‘to forget a good book so quickly, that she really did not like to begin to read one.’

‘Have you quite forgotten everything about it?’ inquired Olive. ‘Is there nothing you can remember to tell me?’

‘Not one word. I am very sorry, little Olive, but the whole thing has gone out of my mind as completely as if it had never been in it. Perhaps,’ added she, seeing the child’s disconsolate face, ‘perhaps I should not be doing so very wrong to let you read this one book—just this one. It is very short, and has pictures, and it is my fault for forgetting the story. I should have told it to you if I could have remembered it, and there is not much difference between telling it to you and letting you read it yourself; so I think you may as well keep it out. But mind,’ she continued, half repenting this concession, ‘you must not tease me to let you read one of the other books, for I have given a promise to your uncle, and, you see, a promise is such a very sacred thing.’

‘I had better not read this, perhaps,’ said Olive, hesitatingly.

‘Oh yes, you may read that. I have told

you you may, and it was to be as I thought best : but no more—not one more. You will find me very strict about these things, Olive. I told your uncle I should be so.'

'Oh,' cried Olive in some triumph, 'but I have read ever so many of the books in this book-case already! I have read "The Mysteries of Udolpho," on this first shelf; and "The Children of the Abbey," and "St. Clair of the Isles," and "The Cottage on the Cliff," on the one above; and "Melmoth," and "Tremaine," and "The Castle of Otranto," and I dare say ever so many more.'

'Dear me! Well, I should not have advised your being allowed to read those books—I certainly should not; but if you have read them once you may read them again, for no doubt you have got all the harm out of them you can get; so when you want a book, Olive, you may just take one of those which you have read already. But no new ones, mind you, not one! You are not to ask me. And, oh dear, if you are not standing all this time with your poor bare little feet, and nothing on but your nightdress, and that is a thing I

am so very particular about ! Jump down, and I'll send Hannah at once. She will help you to dress, and then come quickly down. There is some nice new milk, warm from the cow, waiting for you.'

'I wonder what that is,' was Olive's thought, but she was ashamed to show her ignorance by asking.

'You may run about as you like,' said Aunt Lettice after breakfast, 'but your uncle does not wish you to be allowed to play with the village children ; if you see any of them about, take no notice of them. You won't see them unless you go to some of the gates.'

Olive, however, wanted no playfellows this first day. She had kingdoms, empires, new worlds to discover and explore, and hour after hour passed in entrancing bewilderment. She did not give much thought to the human occupants of the Grange and its gardens. She roamed here and there, and at first it was pleasure enough to pry into the recesses of folded leaves or cup-like flowers where the sun had not yet pierced its way, and to force the

lurking dew-drops to run to seek their fellows ; and merrily she laughed when, after a little helpless tumbling about on leaf, or petal, two drops as round as the **O** of Giotto bumped against each other, and slowly and heavily rolled into one. When she was tired of that, she divided the garden into the four quarters of the world. She peopled them with imaginary inhabitants of all kinds, distributing these with as much regard to her own little theory of probability as was possible. An apple orchard was the abode of giants who walked about with heads high above the fruit-trees, and, when the fruit was ripe and rosy, would be able to look down on the best and brightest of the clusters at the very top, and take what they liked for themselves. Olive was sure that the beauteous Saba, wife to St. George of England, was chained to one tree far in the depths of the orchard, and, unless rescue came, would be devoured. Sometimes as the child passed this stronghold of gianthood, she timidly listened for the clash of knightly arms ; more usually, she ran quickly by, lest she herself should be captured. A dense thicket of gooseberry-

bushes was the hiding-place of serpents with endless lengths of coil ; a bed of tender lilies of the valley sheltered fairies who climbed up the flower-stalks from bell to bell as by a delicately constructed ladder, and peered forth on the world from the highest of these tiny perfumed white tents, ready to take flight the moment any child of man appeared. After an hour or two, the whole garden was densely peopled by heroes and heroines of 'The Seven Champions of Christendom,' or of Madame D'Aulnoy's Tales, and Olive went reverently up and down, half overborne by the sense of the presence of these supernatural beings, in whose existence she all but implicitly believed. She was conscious of a certain feeling of fear as well as of reverence, and ran by the lair of the deadly snakes, trembled if a leaf rustled, and half expected to see the giants towering above the apple-trees, or an enormous hand stretched forth from amongst the lichened branches. She knew 'The Castle of Otranto' by heart, and was well prepared for the sight of nodding plumes at any unwonted elevation from the earth. She was familiar with corridors and

subterranean passages, and with antique lamps, whose slender flame expired just as the beautiful heroine or dauntless hero had become aware that he was no longer alone in the dark and vaulted chamber. Olive had always had a burning desire to find a concealed treasure, but never could feel that any such luck was likely to befall her in London, which was much too crowded for anyone to be able to take up a paving-stone in order to hide stores of gold or jewels. Now, in the country, every broad stone which she saw laid down in field or garden seemed to her the possible covering of a treasure of dazzling rubies or diamonds, all of which would be hers by right of discovery if she could but find them ; or there was the hope, the scarcely hoped-for hope, that she might live to find, to see, and have for her own, handfuls, nay, basketfuls, of the jewels with the lovely names which it was her joy to read about in the Bible.

CHAPTER III.

Truly I would the gods had made thee poetical.

As You Like It.

To mark the structure of a plant or tree,
And all fair things of earth how fair they be.

CHARLES LAMB.

AFTER a fortnight had passed, Olive, who had more than once looked wistfully at various little brown-faced village children, began to pine for a companion—some one to help her to play. She confided this wish to Aunt Lettice, and asked if she might play with Willie Morrison, the butcher's nephew. He was a little London boy on a visit to his north-country relations in the village. She had seen him pass several times, and he was a very nice gentlemanlike boy, who wore a blue jacket, and not 'brown ribbed things like the village boys.'

'Fustian, you mean,' said Miss Lettice.

'Well, fustian; but Willie Morrison does

not wear it, and he looks so nice. I am sure uncle would not mind my playing with such a good-looking little boy as that.'

'Well, if you think so,' replied Aunt Lettice, 'I am sure I don't object either. He is a good boy, I know, and it is dull for you; but you must promise me never to ask me to let you play with any of the other village children, and you must not bring Willie into the house or garden: your grandfather would not like that; and no other children, Olive, not one single one.'

'Oh no; I did speak to two little girls one day—I on one side of the gate and they on the other; so you don't call that wrong, do you, Auntie? And I just told them about the snakes and giants in our garden, and one ran away crying so loud you could hear her all the way to the village, and the other said I was "a bad girl and told lies!" Weren't they stupid? But I like boys best, so never mind.'

Having obtained her aunt's consent, Olive waited at the gate until Willie passed. She knew that he went down the lane every day about half-past eleven. She did not wait long.

He was a frank-looking, bright-eyed boy of her own age, with a quiet thoughtful way of looking about him, and a pale London-bleached face. He was kicking stones along the road as any other young gentleman might have been doing, and stopping every now and then to look at anything which interested him.

‘Don’t go past the gate,’ cried Olive. ‘Stay and play with me.’

‘Girls can’t play,’ he replied doubtfully, but with something very like a pleased smile breaking over his whole face.

‘Oh, but I can,’ said Olive; ‘besides, I can tell you stories.’

‘With plenty of killing in them?’

‘Yes, some with killing in them. But do you like stories of that kind best?’

‘Yes, I like killing ones best, and murders out of the newspapers.’

‘I am afraid he won’t do,’ thought Olive, ‘he is vulgar-minded;’ then she said, ‘I can tell you some killing stories out of books. I don’t like them in newspapers, they put such ugly bits in them, but I can tell you some which you will care far more for, out of

Macaulay's Lays, and the Scottish Minstrelsy. But, where were you going ?'

'To my aunt's, as far off as you can see along the lane. I go there every day with a message.'

'Then you can't stay and play ?'

'Ask if you may go with me.'

'Well, dear,' said Miss Lettice, in answer to this request, 'if you feel that you could enjoy a walk, it is a sign that it would do you good to go. I think you may, for it is not far ; but remember, in a general way I like you best in the fields close by, or in the garden.'

After this the children were inseparable. Willie was actually nearly two years older than Olive, but she was in reality older than he. She soon began to be warmly attached to the boy, yet she despised him intellectually, thought his taste in literature contemptible, his aim in life woefully low, his feeling for poetry nil ; but in spite of all, after a while she loved him passionately. This love was the fruit of her novel-reading. She had cultivated it from a feeling that it was time she had a real lover of her own and that there was no one else in Austerfield

to play the part. Willie was the only boy who was gentlemanlike, and wore a blue jacket ; all the others were clods, who were cruel, and tortured birds and butterflies, and did not even look at flowers, but spent all their holiday time in cutting sticks or throwing stones. Willie liked flowers without much prompting from Olive, never hurt animals, and was ready to devote himself from early morning till late evening to her. This was the only proof of love he gave her, but it was unfailling. Olive, who—thanks to her aunt's general benevolence to children, and slippery manipulation of promises—had since she came to Austerfield read romances enough to turn a grown-up head, and who nightly sobbed as if her heart would break over the sorrows of Emily and Valancourt in 'The Mysteries of Udolpho,' or of Amanda in 'The Children of the Abbey,'—who was used to the kind of novel in which hero and heroine go through every probation, every misery and injustice which cruel parents, guardians, or traitorous uncles, and stony-hearted relatives can inflict, and at last come out of all, triumphant in love and happiness—would have

liked some such stormy experience herself. She wanted Willie to protest his adoration. She in return would confess her love ; all would go smoothly for a few weeks, during which they would keep their passion to themselves and grow nearer to each other daily ; then trouble would come, and for ten or fifteen years they would neither of them know a happy moment, but bear and suffer unheard-of miseries and privations—perhaps be locked up and fed on bread and water—all which things they would go through with smiling faces and absolutely unshaken constancy. She pictured to herself the bliss of living for months with no other solace than a secretly conveyed letter, and foresaw the day when at length their Hyrcanian-tiger-hearted relatives would say that it was altogether in vain to try to part such faithful lovers—that they were made for each other, and that it was not in the power of mortal men to turn aside the decrees of fate. That is what she desired ; what she had was this : every morning when it was possible to go out, Willie waited for her under a lime-tree in a very pretty field half-way between the

Grange and the village. Then they walked in the fields around, making up large bunches of flowers which they loved far too well ever to throw away when tired of carrying them. They learnt to know so well where each flower grew that they could have found it in the dark, and to them the budding and blossoming of the fluttering bird-cherry, or the waxlike and golden barberry, or the sight of the first long spike of lilac campanula, was an event waited and watched for for weeks. As the year advanced, they brought home baskets of mushrooms, leaves filled with wild strawberries, or cans of blackberries, and when tired they flung themselves down by the side of a tiny beck they were very fond of, and watched the trout lying with their heads up-stream, looking like semi-transparent golden-brown blots in the clear water, or the minnows flashing by in the sunshine. After two springs and summers together at Austerfield they attained a new sense with regard to birds, and found nest after nest with the instinct and precision of savages ; and when winter came, that too brought its own joys. Children as they were, they never had a

quarrel. Willie seemed passively happy and perfectly content to give up the direction of himself and of his days to Olive. Olive was happy, but she wanted something more. She longed to see Willie throw himself at her feet, and to hear him say, 'Olive, I love you with the whole strength of a passionate nature, and without your love I die.' She wondered if he did love her. He appeared to do so, for he never seemed to care to be with anyone but herself. Sometimes the village boys met them, and called Willie a milk-sop, a lass-lad ; but they very soon fled if he ran after them.

There was only one thing with respect to which Olive and Willie were not in perfect harmony, and that was poetry. Perhaps Miss Olive, unconsciously to herself, affected to admire things which at her age she was unable really to care for, from deference to names which she had been taught to respect. She repeated 'Lycidas' to Willie (her uncle had made her learn it). Willie was bored, and said it was very fine, and there was a good deal of it, and that he did not care for poetry except, perhaps, 'John Gilpin.' Olive thought 'John

Gilpin 'silly, and had a great dislike to poetry which only aimed at amusing her. Then she repeated one of Madame D'Aulnoy's fairy tales, and behold ! all Willie's sympathies went with the dragons, and when they carried off wondrously beautiful princesses in mad flight through the air, his only wish was to know at what rate of speed they could fly. He was bored by 'Undine,' which alternately delighted and terrified Olive ; and until it occurred to her to tell him ghost stories, she could not touch him on the side of wonder at all.

She spent hours and days in planning their future life together, which was to be spent underground. Somewhere—the spot was unknown to her as yet—but somewhere, she was sure, half hidden by briars and brambles, they would find an entrance to a range of long-forgotten subterranean caverns which they would make their own of—hide from the knowledge of everyone, furnish stealthily, and then inhabit. There was endless food for thought and conversation in furnishing and arranging these. The carpets were to be skins of wild beasts. The rooms were to be

lighted with coloured lamps. There was to be a drawing-room, dining-room, and library. The library was to contain every book in the world. Willie was base enough to think of food; but food was promoted to the level of poetry when they remembered that no one must know of their existence, and that they must steal away by night to distant towns to bring back all they wanted, or Willie must take his gun and shoot in one night a provision which would last them for six months. They resolved to begin at once to save up their pocket-money to buy stores of candles, matches, gunpowder, and clothing.

‘I mean,’ said Olive, ‘to wear crimson velvet in the cave, for it will look so pretty against the dark-brown rocky walls; and you too, Willie, had better wear some colour of the same kind; but we must have quite ugly common things when we go out, so that we may pass unnoticed as mere peasants. Oh! Willie, how delightful it will be!’

‘But we haven’t found our cavern yet,’ observed Willie, who was prosaic to the very backbone, ‘and perhaps we never shall.’

‘We are certain to find one,’ cried Olive. ‘The idea has come to us so strongly that you may be sure that it has not been given to us for nothing.’

‘It certainly would be awfully jolly to be always going about by night in the dark!’ said he.

‘And so delightful to think no one knew where we were!’ added Olive.

In the autumn after their first meeting, Willie had to return home and go back to school, but he was to spend his Christmas holidays at Austerfield. To Olive it seemed life would stand still from the moment when he left her, and she earnestly hoped that he would be equally miserable; but Willie was wanting as regarded all due expression of his grief, if indeed he felt any pain worthy of the name. To him the knowledge that he was coming back at Christmas seemed a sufficient reason for bearing up in the interval, and when he spoke of his return to London he dwelt principally on the fact that he hated learning lessons.

‘But, Willie, won’t you miss me, and our walks and talks?’

‘Yes, of course; but mind, by that time it would be getting very cold for us to sit out.’

Olive would have sat down contentedly on the highest peak of frosty Caucasus, if she could but have had Willie by her side, and a tear rose to her eyes at his speech; but she did not choose to let him see it, and hiding her face for the moment, she said, ‘We will be happy at Christmas.’

‘Yes, that’s a very jolly time. I like being here then, grandmother does make such awfully good Yule cakes! Does your aunt have them made with sultana raisins or the others?’

For a minute Olive perfectly hated him; to show her indifference she said, ‘Oh, no doubt she has them made good somehow, but I dare say I shall have to go to my own home at Christmas, so I shall neither see you nor the cakes.’

‘Oh, but if you are not here, Olive, I don’t want to come,’ exclaimed Willie, who had so completely surrendered the conduct of his existence to Olive that he could not conceive life

in Austerfield without her. She was content with that, and just on the point of saying, 'Then you do love me, Willie, in spite of the bad speeches you make to me?' but she was shy, and sat in silence wondering how she was to get through the weeks which must pass before Christmas came.

When she bade Willie good-bye, she was pleased to see that he looked very much troubled about leaving, though shy of showing it. She slipped into his hand her own best-bound favourite book, in which with a very bad pen she had blotted in his name. 'It is for you, Willie,' she said, with quivering voice, 'and you must not forget me.'

'I am not likely to forget you, Olive—it is only eleven weeks——'

Olive shivered; that speech was one which might be interpreted in two ways and both disagreeable.

'Well, good-bye, Olive, don't you forget me, or my rabbits either. You will see that they feed them, if your aunt will let you go; an mind, it is very bad to give them wet cabbage.'

‘We ought to kiss each other when we say good-bye, Willie,’ said Olive, for he was going after shaking hands with her. So, awkwardly enough, he gave her a limp, shapeless kind of kiss and went, while Olive, who had struggled to bear up until now, broke out into the most passionate agony of grief that she had ever known. To hide her tear-stained face she retreated to the hay-loft. There she stayed for hours uttering bitter complaints against destiny for separating her from Willie, against Willie for being so contemptibly small-natured as to part with no sign of pain from one who had been all in all to him for six whole months. She would eat no dinner, read no book, listen to no comfort, and when night came she went to bed thinking that every day of the next eleven weeks must be spent in equal wretchedness—how could it be otherwise when Willie was away? She did fret next day, but in the evening she condescended to join the family circle, and there she heard something which comforted her and restored her love to the dignity of a faith. Mr. Begbie, the clergyman of the parish, was talking to her Aunt Lettice

about the difference in the nature of girls and boys. 'Girls,' he said, 'are little women almost from the beginning; boys, dull, stupid, blundering creatures, who till the age of seventeen or eighteen can neither express nor know, the feelings which govern them.'

'That's it!' thought Olive. 'Willie loves me so deep in his heart that he can't go burrowing down to see how much, but he loves me and I love him.' She doubted his love no longer, but woefully missed his company, and hung about looking so dull and listless, that even her poor old grandmother, aged eighty-one, saw that she was ill, and therefore out of love with life and its enjoyments. With a gentle thought of the blessedness of rest in the tranquil grassy churchyard which she dimly saw lying before her own bedroom windows, she said, 'I think they'll be putting both of us in the ground together, little Olive, before so very long a time is over, if you don't get stronger soon.' Olive looked up in surprise and alarm at her grandmother, whose face was wrinkled and puckered, and whose lips were violet with age, then her eyes turned to the black and

white headstones which marked the graves in the churchyard. She tried in an awe-struck manner to think what it would feel like to be lying there by her grandmother's side for years and years instead of running about on the soft green grass above. The idea was horrible! 'I don't want to die,' exclaimed the child; 'I don't feel as if I could die.'

Then her grandmother put her cold hand on hers, and Olive recoiled as if Death itself had touched her. The movement was unperceived by the old lady, who said, 'If God took you now, Olive, it would be a merciful act. You would be spared a long weary life of fighting with sin and sorrow.'

'Didn't you like your life when it was nice, grandmother? I know it is not very nice for you now.'

'Yes, I liked it far too much! It is very wicked to set your affections on this life.'

'But,' said Olive in desperation, 'God gave you your life; did He think He was giving you a bad thing when He gave it to you? Did He want you to be miserable?'

The child began to cry, for a chill had fallen

on her ; and in dread of hearing more, she crept out of her grandmother's room into the garden ; but there, too, death and decay were busy. The trees were bare of leaves, the beds of flowers, Willie was away, and she felt desolate and hopeless.

‘Nay,’ cried Miss Lettice, when, an hour afterwards, she went out and saw Olive’s pale face and her red eyes, ‘but this is the road to no place ; you are fairly killing yourself for want of something sensible to do ! You shall go to school to-morrow morning, as sure as my name is Lettice Brooke.’

Her name was Lettice Brooke, and next morning Olive went to the village school, with a special recommendation to the master who kept it, to place her at some distance from the village children. She was, therefore, put at the end of the bench just below his own desk, so that he might conveniently check all approach to inappropriate friendships by keeping her under his own eyes.

She was so completely under his eyes that when her spirits returned, he found he saw a great deal more than he had bargained for :

caricatures of himself which did not tend to feed his vanity ; portraits of nearly everyone in the school ; verses, chiefly sentimental—any art and every art received its share of attention but the right one. Sums still ‘ cracked ’ Olive, but after a very short time there was so marked an improvement in that respect that the master was astonished. It was all due to Aunt Lettice, who kept the child so well supplied with pocket-money that she was able to buy toffy to bribe the big boys to do her arithmetic for her, which carried her triumphantly over the four simple rules, and landed her with distinguished honour in the rule of three.

At Christmas, just as Olive expected to see Willie again, she was summoned back to London. She wrote a short note of misery, spelt misery, to him, and then went home, and was remarkably happy there. Her rosy cheeks delighted her uncle, and her sympathy with novel-writing charmed her aunt.

‘ We will keep that dear child at home with us, now that we have got her,’ said Dr. Brooke ; ‘ the house is twice as delightful to me when it has her bright little face in it.’

‘Oh yes, do let us keep her,’ said Mrs. Brooke; ‘she is no trouble whatever. I believe she sat for two whole hours writing this morning, without disturbing me once.’

‘Letters, or what, poor little thing?’

‘She was writing what she called her novel. She took a few sheets of letter-paper, and cut them into squares, and then scribbled away as contentedly as possible. I can’t tell you in the least what it was all about—her style may be clear, but I am sure her writing is not.’

‘Selina, you are determined to ruin that child! I won’t allow this writing—it is the worst thing possible.’

‘It will get her insensibly into the habit of composition.’

‘I’ll not allow it! I don’t want her to compose. I should look on it as the greatest misfortune which could befall her if she took to anything of the kind.’ The doctor meant what he said, and thought that his house with yet another author in it would be simply unbearable.

‘Well, dear,’ replied Mrs. Brooke quite composedly, ‘be easy; if I write well, it is very unlikely that Olive will have the talent also.’

CHAPTER IV.

Only my love's away,
I'd as lief the blue were grey.
R. BROWNING.

It was not long before Olive was sent back to Austerfield. 'After all, she gets health there,' thought Dr. Brooke with a sigh, when he parted from her. 'It is astonishing how soon she lost her pretty colour after she came back here.' Willie's father, a clerk in a City bank, with a small salary and a delicate wife, was also glad enough to consign his boy to the care of a devoted grandmother, and know that, while he himself was living between the dingy bank in Threadneedle Street and the small and depressing house in Hanway Town, his boy was having the run of woods and fields, and enjoying pure country air. Mr. Morrison, of Grove Place, Hanway Town, and Dr. Brooke, of 350

Harley Street, both sent their children away to the little Yorkshire village with much the same thought in their minds. 'If even the child does run a little wild, it is a fine thing for it to be in the country; in a year's time or so it must come home and set to work to learn something in real earnest.' But the grandparents of both Olive and Willie thought it was quite time for them to begin to do that at once, and made them go every morning to the village school from nine till twelve. The rest of the day was, however, their own, and dearly they enjoyed it. They were as inseparable as ever, the only difference being that their talk was a little less childish, and their walks were a little longer. Aunt Lettice, never at any time much of a check on Olive, was now almost entirely engrossed by nursing her father and mother, and the servants also, for the same reason, were not so free as they used to be; so the children spent every afternoon and evening together. They passed many an hour in the churchyard, which stretched along side by side with the Grange garden. Olive was fond of showing her skill in deciphering black-letter inscriptions

and telling pathetic stories about everyone with a pretty name who lay buried there. She credited the plain John Browns and Jane Smiths with lives as dull as their names. Each child passed the black tombstones with a shudder of horror faintly tempered by pity ; they thought good people were buried under white tombstones and the wicked under black ones, and the black ones were in Austerfield churchyard sadly too frequent.

Near the church porch was the old stone coffin of one of the Neville family. In this the children used to sit making wreaths of flowers, or resting from their rambles, and sometimes, in grim play, one of them lay down to try to fit a little living head into the round hole which had once held the dead one. ‘If you and I had really been buried in a coffin like this, Willie, hundreds of years ago——’ began Olive.

‘—We should not be sitting here now,’ interrupted Willie the prosaic.

‘No, no, I don’t mean that ; we should have a great flat stone lid above us, with our pictures carved on it, both of us lying side by side, and we should have a lap-dog to put our

feet on, and a cushion for our heads, and you would have a sword by your side to show that you were a knight, and I should have a pair of scissors.'

'But how do you know I should have been a knight?' asked Willie.

'Oh, of course you would—I should not have known you if not!' And then she remembered, what had been a great source of pleasure to her for some time, that, as it was, Willie was very much below her in station, and that when the time came to tell her family that they loved each other and meant to marry, there would be a terrible outburst of wrath. No doubt such a marriage would be immeasurably repugnant to Doctor and Mrs. Brooke, as well as to her father and mother, and they would all be sure to act in such a severe way as to afford Olive a most enviable opportunity of showing the stuff of which she was made; and she would show it! No one who ever yet lived in this world should eclipse her in constancy, patience, and fidelity. Her novel-reading had taught her to regard all parents and guardians as cruel and worldly tyrants; and though she dearly

loved her own uncle and aunt, and had never received from them anything but kindness, she had a firm and hopeful reliance on all this changing when once suitors began to present themselves, and marriage to be talked of.

Miss Lettice, out of false kindness, had really done her little niece somewhat of an injury, for now she lived in a perfectly unreal world. The good old lady undoubtedly spoke much truth when she asserted that she forgot every book an hour after she had read it, and this must be accepted as her excuse for sanctioning a strangely miscellaneous course of reading. However, if Olive's novel-reading made her very foolish and romantic, it did her no other harm, for, doubtful as some of these productions were, she saw no evil in them. She was silent for some time, but her mind was busy with the great question—how would her father receive Willie? Suddenly a thought struck her, and her only wonder was that it had never occurred to her before. Suppose Willie was not what he seemed? In almost all the novels she had ever read, heroes who began life as peasants of a superior make turned

out to be the eldest sons of dukes in the third volume. How odd it would be if that were the case with him, and the inferiority of rank were on her side ! But while she was still struggling with this great idea, he said, ' I can't play with you this afternoon, Olive ; I am going to Bishop-ton with my uncle on the pony. It will be awfully jolly,' said he, seeing a look of dismay in her face, and perhaps wanting to talk down any objections which she was going to raise. ' I am to have uncle's pony, and he is going to ride Mr. Thompson's mare, and he has promised to gallop whenever I like ; and if he has only got time enough after he has done all his business at market, he means to take me to see the wild beasts' show. I wish you could go, Olive ; it would be twice as nice if you were there too ! '

Olive's heart swelled.

' There's lions and tigers and an elephant, and a man puts his head in the lion's mouth, and I mean to have a ride on the elephant.'

' And you are going to leave me alone, to be away a whole afternoon, for the sake of a few lions and tigers ! '

‘Well, but really, Olive, such beasts as that——’

‘Oh, nonsense about beasts! If you go, you can’t love me. If you go like that, Willie, I’ll love you no more and never seek flowers with you again.’

‘But for once? When it would be such pleasure?’

‘Would it be such pleasure?’ asked Olive, impetuously. ‘Well, go then, and come back and tell me all about the beasts to-morrow. I forgot it would be such a pleasure, I wish I had not been so cross about it.’

‘You see, there’s the ride,’ said Willie, apologetically; ‘I’ve never had a long ride on that pony, and uncle wants me with him.’

‘It would be very nice, and you must go,’ said Olive; after which speech, she made no more objections, but nature was tinged with gloom, and all true dependence on Willie’s love was gone. She was put in the scale with wild beasts and found wanting! She had all along been nothing else but a self-deceiving fool! They parted as usual at mid-day. She dined with her family, feeling no interest in mashed

potatoes browned before the fire, no joy in apricot tarts decked with white kernels. Listlessly she hung about the house, until at last, for fear her grandmother should see her and set her down to a long seam, because she looked 'sorely in want of something to do to keep her hands from idleness,' she went out to make in sad loneliness the accustomed round of the home-fields, before she went into the Camp field, or the Well-springs, or little Scrogs Wood, or Willowby Plump; for every field, every group of trees, had its name, and each had its daily visit. The first field was one next the Grange, and her grandfather's two cows were pastured in it. On a happier day Olive, when she saw Beauty lying at rest, would have stolen on to her back, and, if she kept her place during the tumultuous struggle of the cow to its feet, have tried how long she could maintain her seat on that sharp bony ridge of Mrs. Beauty's backbone. But to-day the sleek red cow lay unmolested; Olive had no heart to play, no desire for flowers either; she could find pleasure in nothing, for Willie was not there! Besides, it was almost certain that she

would have to revise and remodel the whole scheme of her future life, for what Willie had done proved him to be one to whom it would be hardly prudent to give the love of her life.

The next field was a corn-field. All the corn was cut and bound, and set up in stooks; and when she saw that this was done, two big tears ran down her cheeks, for she and Willie had settled in their own minds, when last they saw it, that it probably would be cut by this day, and they had resolved to come and, if it were so, to make themselves a house with some of the sheaves, and spend the afternoon therein. She half crossed the field—then she could bear her loneliness no longer, and threw herself down with her back to the sheaves and had a good cry. A rustling disturbed her. She saw another group of sheaves at a little distance from her move, and from behind them crept Willie. He came to her looking bright, rosy, and affectionate, and putting his arm round her he kissed her, and said, ‘Don’t cry, Olly; you see I did not go, after all.’

This was but the second kiss the children had ever exchanged. Olive would often have

kissed Willie, but, as it never seemed to occur to him to kiss her, she was too shy.

‘Did you stay at home on my account?’ she asked, divided between smiles and tears.

He nodded and said, ‘I told uncle I didn’t want to go.’

‘Oh, Willie, and you did want!’ she said this very regretfully. ‘But never mind, I do love you for it!’ She threw her arms round his neck, and in her turn kissed him, and then she sat still holding his hand in hers. ‘Willie, we do love each other,’ said she.

Willie looked at her with troubled affection; he was very fond of her, but he had a great dislike to showing any signs of it. ‘If I didn’t love you, Olive,’ said he with one glance at his recent sacrifice, ‘I should not be here now.’

‘I know; but you do love me, Willie?’

‘Of course I do; you see, we have been so much together.’

‘Better than anybody in the world?’ asked Olive.

He gave a calm, well-thought-out assent, and then added, ‘None of my sisters are half so nice as you.’

‘And better than any of the girls you play with in London?’

‘Oh, I never play with any girls in London! I don’t like any of those I know, well enough to play with them. They are stupid things, with nothing sensible to say for themselves; not like you, Olive!’

Olive smiled; she had a certain pride in her intellect; she was well aware that on that side she was stronger than Willie.

‘When I am with you,’ said Willie, ‘I always find that it is quite time for me to go home when I think I’ve just come out; that’s because we are happy, I suppose; that makes the time seem so short.’

‘Willie, I do love you!’ cried the passionate little Olive. ‘To-day when I came out, and you were not here, I didn’t know what to do—I had nothing to do or to care for; I was just wishing myself dead! We must always love each other just as much as we do now.’

‘Yes,’ said Willie.

‘And, Willie, when we grow up, you are not to mind my father and mother, or my uncle and aunt, being cruel to us; and if they say

disdainful things to you, you must bear them as a way of showing your love for me. You must keep constant to me through everything, and, Willie, I will do exactly the same; I won't be unkind to them, or disobedient to them, but I will always say, "You need not try to get me to give up my Willie, for I never can. I have always loved him, and I always shall!"'

'Yes; that's what we will both say,' exclaimed Willie, who either really felt as she did, or liked the martial sound of the words.

'And when they say to you, as I am afraid they will some day, Willie—for you see, unfortunately, my relations are of a superior rank to yours—"We cannot suffer our daughter to make this missyliance—your station, young sir, is an insuperiorable bar to any union with our house," you are to lay your hand on your heart and flash defiance with your lustrous brown eyes and say, "Measure not my rank by my birth, but have regard to my achievements."'

'I say, Olive! But you are going it!—Achievements! what do you mean?'

'Nay, that's what they say in all the books

that I read ; and besides, you must have some achievements—do something very grand and distinguished, I mean ; you must be a soldier, or a sailor, or win a battle all by yourself, or write a book that the whole world will go mad about—I don't want to fix exactly what you are to do, Willie, but you must do something. Never mind about it now,' said she kindly, seeing that her small companion was beginning to sink under the weight of responsibility she was imposing on him ; 'we will settle about that another day ; all we need care about now is loving each other. It is so good of you to stay at home with me—I do so love you for it, Willie ; I wish I could take you to some nice place to make up for your not going to see the wild beasts. Let us go to Ayton Bank Farm.'

Ayton Bank Farm ! The children had never yet been so far together. They rose alertly, and, with arms entwined round each other's necks, set out for their walk. More than one flower as yet unseen by them was discovered as they passed through the fields, more than one hare roused from a rest so profound that it seemed to the children that their

feet had just missed the pain of trampling on the brown, sleepy creature, when it started off. They pictured to themselves their delight in catching a hare, when once they had taken up their abode in their cave. They tried to enjoy the taste of sloes, and sought for embryo kernels in milky, unripe nuts, and looked with love in each other's eyes all the way as they went. At last they reached the Ayton Bank Farm house-door, and then they remembered that no one had sent them there, and that they had no errand.

‘Never mind,’ said Willie, ‘we must go in now that we have come to the very door. Let us give my grandmother’s respects; she said the other day that she had a very great respect for the people who live here, so we will say that, and that we have just called to see how they were.’

‘Let us say nothing,’ said Olive, ‘but that you are Mrs. Morrison’s grandchild, and that I am Mr. and Mrs. Brooke’s, and that we are out together for a walk; and then if she says, “Naughty children, go away home with you!” well, then we will go home, and that won’t

be so bad as it sounds, for we shall have to do it before long anyhow, whatever she says.'

But the potent names of the grandfathers and grandmothers produced a kindly welcome. 'And you're sweethearts, then, I reckon?' said the farmer's wife as a benevolent joke. 'Well, come in and have some milk and cake.'

Olive glanced proudly at Willie, when she heard the word sweetheart used; she was not going to disown him; he hung his head, and looked a little shamefaced. They stayed tea, and watched a girdle-cake being made for them, and played all kinds of games; and then, in what seemed to them the late and dangerous night, though it was but the dusky fading away of a sweet autumn evening, they, much kissed and entreated to come again, stole home together, with arms confidentially locked round each other's necks, and hearts more open to each other than ever they had been before.

The darkness and the proof of love Willie had that afternoon given to her, made Olive unfold to him the very innermost thoughts of her mind. All her hidden desires were re-

vealed : she told him how she longed to distinguish herself ; how she would like to write anonymously some book the fame of which would ring far and wide, or she alone would man a life-boat, and go through a wild and deadly storm of wind and wave to bring back some shipwrecked crew, and when the Queen wished to have her always in the palace by her side as a reward for her bravery, and afterwards, perhaps, to marry her to some great duke about the court, then Olive would shyly say, ‘Not so, dear lady, in my youth I already met him whom I must love all my life ; none other may win my hand.’ Then the Queen would take her into her own bedroom and shut the door and question her who it was, and she would name Willie ; and then (if Willie had, as she knew would be the case, done deeds of such note that his name was known as soon as spoken), the Queen would say, ‘What, our trusty William Morrison ? Nay, but we are well pleased !’ ‘and then you know, Willie,’ added Olive, ‘our fathers and mothers would be so ashamed of ever having been cross to us about loving each other, and we—no, we should be so

happy, that we should care nothing about the past, and the bad things they had done to us, but freely forgive them and be just as fond of them as ever.'

'And then?' asked Willie.

'Oh, then we should get married, of course,' replied Olive simply.

'And perhaps be just as cross with our children when they wanted to marry against our wishes as ever our fathers and mothers had been with us,' said Willie.

'I am sure we should not!' exclaimed Olive indignantly. 'Mine should marry just exactly as they liked—except chimney-sweeps. I do not think I ever could give one of my beautiful girls to a sweep.'

'Or to a man who went about mending tin pans,' added Willie.

'Oh, no; but don't think of such trades as those—we need not.'

'Your uncle keeps a carriage, Olive, and is quite a grand gentleman. My father told me that, and that he lived in the aristocratic part of the metropolis.'

'If your father said that, Willie, he speaks

very nicely, quite as well as my uncle. My uncle doesn't use words a bit longer than that; but never mind about the carriage, or where we live: all I care for is this, that we love each other, and that I promise, I swear to you, never to love anyone else but you, but to wait patiently in my own home till you come for me and say that you are ready to take me away to your house.'

'I wonder what people do to get houses,' said Willie somewhat sadly. 'How did your uncle get his?'

'By working very hard, and getting to know how to cure people who are ill.'

'I think I'll do that,' said Willie. 'How does one begin?'

'You must know Latin, for one thing—it is all done in Latin, I know: so please to attend to your lessons. I think I'll ask my uncle what you are to do for the rest, if there is more to do, and then when I get to know I can tell you.'

'And then,' said Willie, 'after I have learnt Latin, and got the house and carriage, if I drove up for you one day, and if I was to find

then that you had changed your mind and would not come ?’

This was a deadly reproach to Olive, and her first impulse was anger, but she remembered that serious things were at stake, and said, ‘Willie, you may trust me as you trust yourself ; I say I love you, and that I will wait for you and marry you. You may believe me, I cannot say it more solemnly than I do—I promise you—there !’

‘That’s right,’ said he, with no undue elation.

‘But, Willie—mind, after your last speech, you quite deserve what I am going to say—if you never come? suppose that.’

‘Oh, I am quite sure to come—trust me for that.’

‘When I am really Willie’s wife,’ thought Olive, ‘I must get him to use nicer words—“Trust me for that !” He is not a bit like a lover. Valancourt would have said something that would have made one ready to cry because it was so beautiful. Lord Cherry would have called on heaven and earth, and all the golden stars that stud the vault of heaven, to witness

his truth : and that kind of talk does sound much better, and does make one believe much more ; but never mind.'

'Good-night, Willie,' said she, when they came to the Grange gate. Somehow, it was a tacit agreement between them that he never went into the house.

'Good-night—you are a nice little thing,' said he ; 'I think I'll give you a kiss.'

He gave her a kiss and ran away, and the children did not meet again for years.

CHAPTER V.

And I must work thro' months of toil,
And years of cultivation.—TENNYSON.

DR. BROOKE came down like a wolf on the fold and carried off Olive. Either he was dissatisfied with what he saw of his sister's management, or he was unhappy at home without the child. The day after his return he made one last appeal to his wife, and entreated her to set apart a certain number of hours daily for her writing, and to spend the remainder in the ordinary duties of the British housewife.

‘Impossible!’ she exclaimed; ‘it would be absolutely impossible for me to limit myself in any such way for the present, and I will tell you why—the novel I am now busy with is the very best bit of work I have ever done; I am certain it will be a success, but I must finish it first.’

‘But couldn’t you promise me never to work at it except at stated times?’

‘Of course I could. But I couldn’t keep my word. And if you, Richard, had something in hand which you were quite sure would make your fortune if you could only get it done, could you be kept from going on with it? That is to say, wouldn’t you be very unhappy if you were kept from it? Think yourself. My head is quite full of my last volume—all the people in it are much more alive to me than any of those about me. How could I shut them all out of my thoughts? I know I could not. I intend to see a great deal of Olive, of course, but I must sit in my own quiet room as usual. Don’t begrudge me the time I spend there.’

Dr. Brooke sighed. ‘If you could but wait until the children want less looking after——’

‘And end by never doing anything!’

‘You would make us happy. After all, what is the use of being distinguished? I know what you are, dear wife—is not that enough?’

“Be content to be a private insignificant

person, known and loved only by God and me ; ” that’s what you mean, I suppose,’ said Mrs. Brooke. ‘That is a bit, as I dare say you know, from one of John Wesley’s letters to his wife ; but would Wesley himself have been contented to be obscure ? I doubt it, I am sure ; men are very odd about such things. Besides, he quite justifies the desire for distinction of which he complains in her, by saying in the very next breath, “ Of what importance is your character to mankind ? If you were buried now, or if you had never lived, what loss would it be ? ” ’

‘Dear Selina, you need not quote that against me. I couldn’t speak so unkindly and unjustly to you : All I ask of you is——’

‘To give up a thing I care so very much about. Richard, you have always been a dear kind husband to me, but you would not be so now, if you really made me do this. Remember, I once did give up writing for several years ! ’

Whenever Mrs. Brooke used this plea, her husband was reduced to silence. He found it entirely unanswerable, and felt only that he

had been treating his poor wife with harsh and selfish cruelty. It was quite true that for his sake she had at one time given up writing for some years. But to understand the feelings awakened by this speech of hers, a portion of his early history must be told. Dr. Brooke's father was originally a very rich man, and owner of the greater part of the parish in which he lived. He had a large family of sons and daughters, who had all been brought up to believe that his large fortune would smooth away all the difficulties which lie in the way of those who have to gain their livelihood in some professional career. Suddenly, however, by the dishonesty of a co-trustee, he had lost the greater part of his property. He had most honourably satisfied every claim on him, but only by sacrificing by far the larger part of his fortune. This had crippled his resources at a very unfortunate time, so far as Richard, his third son, was concerned. He had chosen the medical profession, and was diligently studying for it in London when the discovery was made. At the first aspect of affairs it seemed as if Richard's medical studies would have to be

given up, and he would be compelled to accept a place in a government office, which was offered him by a friend. He was boarding at that time with a distant relation of his father's, a widow lady of the name of Egerton, in Gower Street. Mrs. Egerton had birth and education, but so little of this world's other wealth that she was not sorry to eke out her modest income by humouring her Austerfield cousin and taking his son into her house while he attended college. Poor people, however, are always those who have the most money at their disposal when helping a friend in need is in question; and when Richard Brooke suddenly found himself comparatively penniless, Mrs. Egerton refused to let him leave her. He must, she said, continue to be an inmate of her household, and should pay her, if he could not be happy without paying her, when he became either a fashionable doctor or a great man, or both combined. After a time, finding that he was much worried about money matters, she even volunteered to lend him a certain sum for college fees, but it was years before he knew how she obtained it. She had one

daughter, a quick-witted, handsome girl of eighteen, much given to writing romantic verses and sentimental stories for magazines. He had seen some of these in MS., and sometimes even beheld their beatific state of translation into print, but he had a general impression that, as a rule, hard-hearted editors usually declined to accept the fair Selina's contributions. Jealousy, Mrs. Egerton hinted, was at the bottom of this. Richard Brooke did not go so far; he liked the girl, and sometimes he liked the verses. All at once, Selina laid pen and paper by, and made a sort of friendly arrangement with some acquaintances in Russell Square to go there daily to teach their children. He faintly wondered at the time why she gave up the comfort and liberty of home-life to undertake this daily drudgery when there was no need for it; but she looked cheerful and happy enough, and not until he had so far made his way as to be able to repay what he owed to Mrs. Egerton, did he learn that all that Selina had done had been for him, that he had had the use of every penny of her salary, and whatever she had ever made by verse- or story-writing besides,

and that all the money lent to him by the old lady had been earned by the young one. Her unselfish kindness at that time had secured to him the means of entering on an honourable career. To help him she had then freely sacrificed every pleasure dear to youth, and all her literary ambition ; was he, now that she was his wife, to put impediments in the way of her trying to recover lost ground and doing the work she most fancied ? He had married her then out of intense gratitude for her unselfish love ; but did not marrying her imply a wish to make her happy, and had she not a claim on his indulgence now beyond that which any other woman could have had ? He was ashamed of having remonstrated so strongly with her. ‘ Dear Selina, I do not forget your kindness,’ he said, as many a time he had said before when his poor wife had reluctantly hinted at this plea. ‘ Do not think I ever can forget it. You did everything for me then, you shall spend your time as you best like now. I hope your present novel may be a very great success ; I earnestly hope it. Work away at it, and give it every chance. At the same time,

do spare as much time as you can to poor Olive; but I am sure you will.'

'Yes, of course I will; I love you, dear, and I love Olive and the children, and I do try to make you comfortable and happy. As for all your sisters and friends, and people of that kind, I only try to do the best I can, and if they put themselves in the way of finding that insufficient, why, it's their fault and not mine.'

Dr. Brooke sat a minute or two looking at the inheritress of unfulfilled renown opposite to him. There was ink on her fingers, and much on her MS. She looked very tired and worn, and was certainly working far too hard for her health. He had just wished that her novel might be a great success; but when he saw how pale she was, he began to think his wish had not been a wise one, for her industry would redouble with success.

While he was thus considering whether a stern refusal from her publisher might not prove a blessing in disguise, she was thinking that no young man of her acquaintance would make half so handsome a model for a hero as her own very handsome husband. His fea-

tures were magnificent, strong, refined, and regular, his complexion was dark and rich, his hair black without one grey hair. He was six feet high, and singularly well-made. She could not imagine how she could have been so stupid as not to sketch from him before!

Dr. Brooke rose rather wearily. This interview had been very disappointing; but for the present, he felt that there could be no further question of gainsaying his wife's desire. He engaged a governess with a mind of the purely practical order, who set Olive at once to work, and saw that she did her lessons. Months passed, during which she was so well looked after that she had barely time for the merest run into dreamland before she was recaptured. She now and then ranted a great deal, in very bad writing on very untidy scraps of paper, or even *vivâ voce* when she dared, about the dull routine of her daily work, the soul-cramping effect of learning uninteresting tasks by rote, the abject monotony of pacing up and down the gravel-walks of Regent's Park, the trammels of custom which even refused her permission to kick a stupid pebble

about if she liked, when she saw one lying before her; but she was forced to submit. Miss Quilter, a long-waisted, straight-backed lady, with a dazzling gold chain, which she wore—not put round her neck, but caught over a large machine-cut cameo, and hanging down below in an ample festoon—Miss Quilter, with her long thin nose, cold watery blue eyes, and sandy curls pinned and held together on each side of her face by hair pins—Miss Quilter had a will of iron. Nor was Olive's bondage cheered by news of Willie. She had never heard one word of him since they parted. She confided to her governess that when at Austerfield she used to play with a very dear little boy called Willie. Miss Quilter 'wondered her uncle allowed it. It was not nice for girls to play with boys.' Olive innocently disclosed that the little boy's uncle was a butcher, on which Miss Quilter in a frightened whisper begged her to be 'quite sure never to mention that fact again to anyone as long as she lived.' And being pressed for her reason for this strange injunction, Olive was told that she would soon find out for herself that it would not do! She

said that she hoped to see Willie some day, as he lived in Hanway Town, and Hanway Town was very near.

‘My dear!’ cried Miss Quilter, ‘I am convinced that you will never be allowed to know anyone who lives in Hanway Town!’ and then she set a great stone over her lips, and sealed them to silence. Olive could not draw one word more from her on the subject. She had already talked to her aunt about Willie, and Mrs. Brooke had listened and said it was quite a romantic story, and Olive was quite a romantic little woman, and that some day perhaps she would see Willie grown rich and great, riding a beautiful horse in the park, or driving a splendid carriage; but when Olive said she wanted to know what he was doing now, Mrs. Brooke replied that she had not time to trouble herself about that—something very uninteresting, no doubt, in reality, if Olive did but know.

‘But may he never come to our house?’ asked the child; ‘or mayn’t I go to see him?’

‘Go to see boys of that kind! Butchers’ nephews! I never heard of such a thing.’

Dr. Brooke never heard of such a thing

either, when Olive's wish was repeated to him, and he even declined to waste time in feeling horror at the idea. 'Mind your books;' 'Attend to your lessons;' 'Run away, and do be a good girl,' was all that Olive could obtain from an inky-fingered aunt, or an overworked uncle, when this subject was brought forward; and in time she ceased to speak of it, cherishing the thought of her dear little companion all the more tenderly because she was not allowed to speak of him, and retreating, whenever she was able, to a lonely world where all was joy and sunlight, and she and Willie were the sole inhabitants. 'Mind her books:' she had none but school books! Under the Quilter dispensation all novels were locked away, and all poetry was discountenanced save such as contained a due amount of moral teaching. She parsed 'Thomson's Seasons' by way of studying the classics profitably, and read 'Paradise Lost' aloud on Sunday afternoons, passing over the devil's speeches as dangerous. Olive felt the want of what she considered poetry so much, that she took to writing it for herself, and amply repaid herself for all privations that she

was compelled to undergo, by depicting a world entirely to her own taste, where she lived free from any fetters, either of time, or space, or custom. If she touched common earth at all in any of these effusions, it was only when she shrieked—occasionally, alas—in somewhat halting lines! her rage at the chains which bound her. All this dislike of her actual life was very much exaggerated. She was by no means an unhappy child, but she always proclaimed herself as such in verse, because she had a fixed belief that everyone who wrote poetry must write as if under the ban of no common despair.

Dr. Brooke had, however, made too sudden a change in Olive's way of life. He took away the books he disapproved of, but did not give her others. She was torn away from Willie and shut up with Miss Quilter, who was like a bit of arid land on which neither flower nor green herb would grow, and who felt as much sympathy and pity for Olive as a block of Aberdeen granite in a cemetery does for the daisies which are displaced to make room for

it. Alick and Lucy, her cousins, were dear little things, but too young to be more than playthings to Olive.

At last, a year and a half after she had left Austerfield, Olive heard that her Aunt Lettice had been asked to pay a visit in Harley Street, and as soon as the child heard this she was full of delighted expectation of either seeing or hearing of her companion Willie. She asked a multiplicity of questions. Miss Lettice replied, that she knew nothing about him; he had gone back to his own family; he had not been at Austerfield; he was at school, she thought. She dealt with his uncle as usual, and thought it was 'very dishonest of him to charge so much for his best joints! It was too bad in a place where there was no other butcher within two miles, and when he knew that the larder at the Grange was such a bad one for keeping things.'

'Oh, Aunt Lettice,' cried the outraged Olive, 'do say no more about that! I hate it all! Besides, it has nothing to do with Willie; he did not live with that uncle, he lived with his grandmother.'

‘I know where he lived quite as well as you,’ cried Miss Lettice, ‘and you had no business to play so much with him, or ever to know anything about him. Everyone here in London says that, and I say it too! I have been more scolded about that boy, and that time, than I can ever forget! I shall never hear the last of letting you run wild and have all your own way; but all I can say is this, that if you were to come back to Austerfield now, and this Willie happened to be there, you should not say one single word to him. And as for books, you should not touch one of mine. Your uncle and aunt should send whatever they wished you to read with you in your own box, for I never will be so scolded again.’

‘Not speak to Willie if I saw him?’

‘No, not speak to Willie if you saw him! It is no use crying—my mind is quite made up!’

Olive’s tears fell faster and faster,—Miss Lettice grew more and more uncomfortable. ‘Don’t cry, Olive,’ said she nervously; ‘nothing has been said about your going back with me; and if you did go, I do not suppose this

Willie you think so much about would be there.'

'I never—never thought you would be so cruel,' sobbed Olive.

'I—I am not cruel—I would do anything for you, Olive—anything that was good for you, I mean!' But Olive would not be comforted.

'Don't go on crying, dear, please don't. I will show you that I am not cruel. Come upstairs with me. I have something in my box which I am sure you will like; come, and you shall have it.' Thus saying, she led the child tenderly upstairs—unlocked a box, and drew out two very gaudy railway novels translated from the French, with agonizing pictures on the covers. 'There, child, you may read those if you like. There is nothing in them to hurt you—at least, I am almost certain there is not,' she added, with a sudden distressed consciousness that their contents had entirely slipped out of her mind.

'Thank you,' replied Olive, putting them down; 'Uncle forbade me to read novels.'

'Then, here,' said poor Aunt Lettice,

fumbling nervously with the catch of her purse,—‘here is a sovereign for you—ask your uncle to tell you what books you may buy with it, and then you will have something to amuse you.’

CHAPTER VI.

Oh days wherein all songs of birds were sweet,
The birds that mock us now with boisterous mirth ;
Days when we laughed for joy of summer's heat,
Nor laughed less well when snow made white the earth !

THIS present of Miss Lettice's led to the only adventure which enlivened Olive's life for years. Proud of her errand, the child went with Miss Quilter to the bookseller's, and came hurrying back to luncheon, exclaiming, 'Oh, Uncle Richard—Aunt Selina—such a very strange thing has happened ! Just listen—let me tell you. We took your list to Heathfield's shop, and we were turning over the books he brought us—and he is so stupid, uncle, he hasn't half those you wrote on your list—he said they were out of date—well, we chose amongst those he had, and when we were done, and I was giving your address for the parcel to be sent, a lady I had not noticed before turned

suddenly round, looked very steadily at me as if she wanted to see deep down into my eyes, took my hand in both hers, and said, "Don't think it strange of me to shake hands with you, dear ; your father and I were friends a long time ago—you are very like him ;" and so she stood looking at me, and I stood looking back at her for ever so long, or perhaps it only seemed so long to me because I felt so strange and as if I did not know what to do or say, and then she said, "I hope he is quite well," and Miss Quilter came and answered and told her that you were pretty well, but that you were not my real papa, and after that the lady went away. What ought I to have said ?'

'Quite a romantic adventure !' cried Mrs. Brooke, adopting her usual formula. 'I think I had better use it—I will make the lady very beautiful——'

'She was beautiful,' interrupted Olive, 'in a heavenly, star-like way.'

'I will describe her beauty in more intelligible language,' said Mrs. Brooke, 'and, Richard, I'll make her the wife of the gentleman she asks after, only he shall have married

again because he thought this lady, the first wife, you know, was dead.'


'Selina dear, I really think it would be better if you were to compose your novels in the stillness of your own chamber.'

'Oh, there shall be no harm in this at all; my book shall be a kind of Enoch Arden story turned the other way. The first wife shall never reveal herself, but shall flit about her husband's path all his life. She shall take care never to let him see her, but she shall be a sort of good angel to him and his family, and do everything she can for them all. Oh! I will make it so beautiful and touching!—Why, Richard, how pale you are!'

'I am affected by your new plot,' said he drily.

Olive was haunted by the pretty lady's eyes for months; she described them as beautiful, sweet, loving eyes, which looked as if they had such a great deal to tell you. She was always longing to see her again, but she never did. She made her the heroine of some romantic poems, and then she forgot about her. She never forgot Willie, though all she could

do to bring herself nearer to him was to gaze affectionately across the chimney-pots in the direction of Hanway Town, or pore over the map of London until she knew by heart the name of every street in the unfashionable suburb in which he dwelt. She spent a great deal of time in forming plans to get to see it, but Quilter the odious—the alert—the unpersuadable, would never listen to any entreaty to walk that way. Either she remembered that her eldest pupil had played with a butcher's nephew who now infested that district, or she herself, grim spinster though she was, preferred to take her walks abroad in a more fashionable neighbourhood—go northwards she would not ; and Olive, at last, gave up seeking to compass her desires, and waited with the settled purpose of making a weak-willed nursery-maid take her there, the very first time they were out together alone. This, however, would not come to pass for four months, when Miss Quilter would go to spend her holidays with her sister. For this Olive waited, pondering meanwhile on the inscrutable ways of Providence, which had permitted the existence of a second Miss Quilter.



At last an opportunity came ; Miss Quilter had departed, and Olive's two little cousins were from home. She began her attack on Betsy by saying that she would like to walk up there, 'right past those trees.' Then she said that she had heard of Hanway Town, and would so like to walk there just to get to know what the place was like.

'I know very well what it is like,' said Betsy ; 'I go there on Sundays when I am out. I have a friend there. But it is nothing to want to see, Miss Olive.'

'But I do want to see it. Let us go there.'

'It is too far.'

'Let us walk on in that direction, and then if we find that it really is too far we can turn back.'

'And then you will go home tired out, and say as how it was my persuading as took you there.'

'No, indeed I wouldn't. I would say nothing.'

'But if I did go all the way there with you, I am sure you wouldn't wait a minute for me

till I just went into Marshall's shop to see if I could have a word with my friend ? '

' How long ? '

' Perhaps five minutes.'

' Yes, I would ; but you must first show me as much of Hanway Town as you can.'

' You won't think much of it when you do see it,' said the girl. ' There's nothing to call aristocratic about it—just clerks and such as that live there.'

At last they reached Hanway Town, and Olive felt a tightness of the heart as she looked at the long rows of small houses. Poor Willie ! But perhaps he lived in one of the better ones. They were all small and dingy, and marked with the brand of humble gentility. Olive did not like little tables covered with crochet table-cloths with one large shell on a fluffy mat, for central and sole decoration.

' Come along, Miss Olive ; we have no more time to lose,' cried Betsy, seeing Olive's eyes and steps so much arrested.

' Should you like to live here, Betsy ?—I mean, to have one of these houses for your own ? '

‘ Well, if anyone was making me a present of it, perhaps ; but if I was a-choosing for myself and had plenty of money, it would have to be something genteeler.’

‘ We will go,’ said poor Olive, sadly.

‘ Yes, but Marshall’s !’ exclaimed Betsy.

They went there ; but Betsy’s ‘ just five minutes’ became three-quarters of an hour, and still Olive was left standing outside, gazing with an utter absence of interest on muslin collars and artificial flowers—a bright show enough, but there was not a flower among them of the good old Austerfield hedge-row pattern. She made various uncertain plunges into the doorway with an idea of seeking Betsy, but the shop was so large that she was afraid to go in. She walked backwards and forwards outside in great uneasiness, and at last began to look as if she were going to cry.

‘ What is it ?’ inquired a soft voice, and looking up, Olive saw the lady of her romance, the lady who had spoken to her in the book-seller’s shop. She was quite as beautiful as the picture which Olive’s memory had preserved of

her. Her dress was a plain black one; well made, but much worn ; nevertheless there was something about her which made Olive think her superior to all the ladies she had ever seen. Olive said she was waiting while Betsy was inside the shop speaking to a friend, but that she was beginning to be afraid she was never coming.

‘Betsy is a very naughty girl ! If your uncle and aunt knew that she left you in the street in this way, I am sure they would be very angry.’

‘Then they must never know, for it is my fault ; I teased her till she came here with me. I wanted so to see what Hanway Town was like.’

‘I wonder why,’ said the lady in so musical a voice that Olive felt there was no power of withholding one thought of her heart from such a pretty sweet-voiced lady, and in her own impetuous way began to tell how, long ago, when she was quite a little girl at her grandmother’s, she had known such a dear boy called Willie, who came from Hanway Town, and how they had been parted and had never

seen each other any more. She had, she said, always longed to get just one peep at Hanway Town that she might be able to picture to herself where Willie was living. 'Do you perhaps know him?' she asked, turning eagerly to the strange lady, whose whole face was lit up by one warm, bright, and loving smile as she answered, 'No, dear child, I don't know him. I am sure he is a nice little boy, though.'

On this Olive put her arm in hers in trusting love, and was on the very point of telling her that they were engaged to be married, and therefore certain to see each other again some day, when she was chilled by these words: 'But you ought not to have come here to-day with your nurse without asking permission.'

'They would very likely have said no, and I did so want to come—I have wished it for three years. It is three whole years since I saw him, and during all that time I have wished it every day of my life.'

'When you are older, little Olive,' replied the lady sadly, 'you will find that these things which we wish for so much that we think of them every day of our lives are often just the

very things which it is not good for us to have, and which we must give up.'

Olive sighed and wondered what the dear lady could have had to give up that she much wished to keep. Something, she was sure. 'Is there anybody whom you want to see as much as I want to see Willie?' Her companion did not answer. She was looking straight before her.

'Are you unhappy?' inquired Olive.

'Yes, dear, I am afraid I am—not always—sometimes—don't think of me.'

Olive clasped her hand tightly and looked with anxious eyes in her face,—instinctively she worshipped her new friend.

Betsy now came out of the shop in a great fuss, looking red and cross, and flourishing an untidy paper parcel of small purchases. 'Miss Olive, that's always the way,' said she in a loud aggrieved aside,—'always! If one just turns one's back on you for a single minute, you are safe to go and get into some mischief or another! Now, you know you havn't ought to have spoken to no strangers, and you promised me you wouldn't.'

‘This lady is not a stranger,’ replied Olive ;
‘I have met her before—besides, she is an old friend of my uncle’s.’

Betsy looked rather disconcerted. ‘Well, it wasn’t me, as you know, Miss Olive, as wanted to walk here in the blazing hot sunshine all the way uphill to Hanway Town. When it comes to be found fault about, you will please to remember that coming here was not along of me or of any wish of mine, but that it was you yourself as kept on plaguing me to come, and worried and said so much about it, that I didn’t know at last whether I was standing on my head or on my heels, and just gave in to you and came.’

‘I never asked you to go into that shop and leave me waiting here for a whole hour,’ said Olive indignantly.

‘I say!—an hour!’ cried Betsy, turning very red ; ‘five minutes, you mean ; and if you expect me to toil all the way up here, and pass by Marshall’s shop without one word to a friend I have there, all I can say is, it is more than can be looked for from anyone.’

Olive was going to reply, but the lady

checked her and told her to say no more ; it was unladylike to dispute. 'Go home and tell your aunt exactly what you have done,' she added ; 'she is sure to be anxious.'

'Her anxious, when she has her pen in her hand !—not a bit of it ; and if Miss Olive goes and tells her everything, as you say, I'm sure it will be too bad ! I did not want to come trailing here.'

'Walk behind us,' said the lady to Betsy ; 'I shall go home with Miss Brooke, and you must follow close behind.'

There was a quiet air of authority about her which Betsy did not feel able to resist. Muttering something about 'It was me as was sent out with Miss Olive, and not you,' she fell behind, and the lady walked quietly home-wards with Olive ; and somehow, though nothing was said in the way of direct fault-finding, Olive became aware that she had behaved very ill in taking Betsy so far without asking leave ; also, that she was not living as she ought to do when she spent so much time in cherishing romantic day-dreams and railing against her lessons. This was quite a new

light to the undisciplined Olive ; she had always thought that by so doing she had chosen the better part, and that it was the truest sign of genius to be discontented with common everyday life.


‘A true genius,’ said her friend, ‘would find beauty and nobility in any life, however humble and commonplace, if borne worthily. Besides, you ought to do your duty before you even think about being a genius.’ Olive hung her head.

‘You love your uncle and aunt?’

‘I should think so! I love Aunt Selina very much, but I’d go barefooted to the end of the world to get a pleased smile from my uncle.’

‘Is that true, dear? You know he gives you a governess because he wishes you to learn, and you know that you won’t even take the trouble to try to understand the lessons she gives you—you only learn them by rote. I have no doubt he would give you as many smiles as you like if he thought you worked as he wished.’

‘He does give me smiles—he does think I work.’



‘Then, you deceive his trust.’

‘I will be different,’ said Olive very gently. She was silent for a while, and very thoughtful for nearly a week afterwards—then she burnt her MSS., and applied herself to work hard with Miss Quilter when she returned, and with such result that even that lady, who did not care much for anything but the dry bones of things, could not but see that her pupil was doing her very best to master what she taught her. She informed Dr. Brooke of this, who came to kiss Olive as she was sitting all alone in the grim professional-looking dining-room, and told her how pleased he was.

‘I know I am working better,’ said Olive ; ‘I am doing it because that lady told me I ought.’

‘Uncle,’ continued Olive, as he only stroked her hair by way of an answer to this speech, ‘what is her other name? She would only tell me that she was called Alice. You remember what she said to me, “Tell your uncle that I hope he won’t think I have taken a liberty in looking after you a little. I did not like to leave you to go home alone

with that maid who had deserted you once already.”’

‘Yes, I know, Olive,’ said Dr. Brooke rather impatiently; ‘you told me all about it before.’

‘But, uncle, was it not odd of her not to tell me her name—her other one, I mean? I wanted her to come in, but she wouldn’t, and then I said, “But who must I say it was that brought me home?” or nearly home it was, you know, for she didn’t come to the door, and she said, “You need only say a lady your uncle used to know a long time ago. We don’t know each other now, so it is of no use to send my name. Tell him that I have spoken to you this once, but only because I thought it was a case of need, and that he may trust me never to speak to you again.”’

“But I want a name to think of you by,” said I; and then she just stooped over me, and one of those smiles of hers came over her whole face, and she said, “You may think of me by the name of Alice,” and so I do.’

‘That is right, dear; but why do you tell me all this over again?’

‘Because I want to know if you don’t think of her too, sometimes?’

Dr. Brooke had been looking down on the child with a face full of grave interest; at this question, which was unexpected by him, he almost started.

‘Of course I do; she is, I think, a lady I knew long, long ago, when I was almost a boy.’

‘A boy of ten?’ cried Olive, thinking this was a similar case to her own and Willie’s, and that perhaps her uncle and this Alice had also loved each other as children and had been parted ever since.

‘A boy of twenty and twenty-five.’

‘And then?’ cried Olive eagerly.

‘Nay, I have never seen her since, and now I am forty-two.’

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Olive musingly. ‘Then, do you think of her by the name of Alice, or by some other name?’ This inquiry was a direct inspiration of the demon of curiosity.

‘I have nothing more to tell you, Olive. She was a very sweet good girl then, and I

have no doubt she is just as good now, but I am not likely ever to see her again. When you grow older, dear, you will find that, as life goes on, people do slip out of your sight, and, though you may still have a strong liking for them, you don't see them.'

'But why not?' cried Olive. 'Perhaps she lives somewhere quite near—we might see her—why don't we?'

'Probably because she has her work to do, as I have mine—it certainly does not leave me much time to see people. I am staying too long with you now. Good-bye.'

Olive was far from being satisfied. She wanted to hear much more about this lady. After this one conversation, she could never induce either her uncle or aunt to name her. Mrs. Brooke always said that she knew nothing about her, not half so much as Olive herself; and Dr. Brooke would say no more than he had said. One thing Olive could not fail to remark, and that was, that henceforth she was forbidden to go out with anyone but Miss Quilter. Daily they took their duty walk together, and often did Olive's eyes scan the

passers-by, to see if by some lucky chance her romantic adventure could be repeated ; but the lady had said, ‘I shall never speak to you again,’ and she did more—she did not even let herself be seen by her.

CHAPTER VII.

With eyes full of sacred imaginings of things that are not.

RUSKIN.

THE reader must be so kind as to imagine that six years have passed since the date of the last chapter, during which time Olive has left childish things behind her, and grown into a remarkably beautiful woman. She was now nineteen, tall, slim, and very upright, with a peculiarly graceful carriage. Her hair, once so unmanageable, was now gathered in bright well-ordered masses round her head. Her eyes were of the dark rich blue which is something like the colour of the stems of wild hyacinths. There was a slight touch of melancholy about them, though melancholy was by no means one of Olive's characteristics; but when she cast down her long black eyelashes, there were depths in her eyes which might mean a tinge

of sadness, or only denote quiet thoughts and much delight in the pleasures of retrospection. Her complexion was a clear faint olive, with a touch of bright colour in her cheeks. She was indeed a bright young maiden altogether; her lips were rosy and her smile bewitching; it lighted up her whole face in one glow of pleasure or sympathetic kindliness. She was very shy, but at the same time impulsive, most thoughtful and most thoughtless. She was active-minded, quick-witted, helpful, and affectionate. It was now nine years since those happy days at Austerfield, and during all that time she had never once seen Willie. Nor had she so much as heard him named, except perhaps once or twice in the casual, contemptuous manner with which a matter of no interest is spoken of and dismissed. Once she heard that he had been at Austerfield, but when she asked her little cousin Lucy, who was her informant, if he had grown tall, and how he looked, and what he did, the said informant had not noticed him sufficiently to be able to tell her.

To Olive herself, his image had by this

time become the very vaguest and most shadowy of memories. She liked to think of him and of the days when they were together; but though in these retrospections the fields and woods and flowers stood up quite clearly before her mind's eye, Willie did not; and, strive as she might, she could not remember his face. Neither could she recall much that he had said to her. In spite, however, of all these drawbacks, the time when they were all in all to each other always stood out as a blissful period of absolutely idyllic happiness. It was a rest from her present life in a smoky, dusty, crowded town, to turn her thoughts back to that peaceful far-off time of sunshine and fresh air. But she never looked for its return, never hoped to see Willie again. These were things which by no means could be restored to her; they were part of other childish joys which there was no renewing. Willie had, no doubt, forgotten her. At their age, nine years are equal to twenty later in life, and that Austerfield time did seem so long ago. Occasionally, with a half-blush, she remembered that there was in the world a young

man whom she had promised to love for ever, to welcome as her husband whenever he claimed her, to whom she had given kisses and every assurance of love in her power. She felt very strange when she thought of these things, and her cheeks grew hot when she reflected that he also must recall them and sometimes think of them as she did. Occasionally, too, she could not help saying to herself, 'If Willie were to remember all this and still care for me and come?' She half caressed the idea, but was half afraid of it. Then she dismissed it by saying, 'Oh, he has forgotten me ever so long ago. How could a boy go on thinking of such silly things for so many years? If ever he thinks of me at all, it is only to be ashamed of having spent so much time in playing with a little girl.' This was on the whole her conviction, and gradually she thought less and less of him and of the past, though whenever she did think of it, it was tenderly. After all, work engrossed most of Olive's time and thoughts. She went daily to a college near her own home, and very hard she strove to learn all that was taught there. French, German, and Latin,

Physical and Political Geography, Biology, Geology, Geometry, Algebra, Logic, and all the other arts and sciences which now it behoves a girl to master, drove out the music of the rapid becks of the north and the visions of sun-lit woods carpeted with flowers. Poetry was rare, parsing and analysis frequent. Fairy tales were left to babyhood, or turned into solar myths; legends were subjected to the light of reason, and all the gods and goddesses of mythology were put in their proper and useful places—kept there, too, for the most part, though every now and then Olive's old spirit broke out, and the old love of romance asserted itself.

To Dr. Brooke these last six years had been years of intensely hard work, during which he had made his way professionally, but had found to his grief that he was no longer a strong man. Constant attacks of illness had weakened his faith in his own health, and had made him somewhat gloomy about the future. He was in other respects quite happy. He no longer distressed himself about Mrs. Brooke's literary craze. Olive his niece was all that he desired.

His boy Alick was at Harrow—his daughters Lucy and Amy were at school in Brighton. They were better brought up than they could have been at home. Mrs. Brooke was much the same as when our story opened—still absorbed in the weal or woe of fictitious personages of her own creation—still bent on flourishing a big cheque in her husband's face some day, which would reward him for his years of waiting for her success. These last years had brought her the joy of seeing three of her novels in print. One, that from which she had hoped so much, had only found a publisher on condition that she paid half the expenses, which half had never been regained by her. Nor had her book brought her much credit. The next novel was printed on the half-profit-and-no-risk principle, after a great deal of signing, witnessing, and delivering. After a long lapse of time came a document professing its intention to show forth an account of sales and returns. But all that was clear to Mrs. Brooke was, that there were no returns. It is true that a respectable number of hundreds of copies had been sold, but the profits had been

so taxed and re-taxed, and subdivided and subtracted from, that 10*l.* or 15*l.* would amply represent her earnings—not a sum with which to make a figure in conversation, or a cheque large enough to flourish in justification of the time which she spent in writing. This novel was called ‘The Fateful Fortnight,’ a name which might in De Quincey’s words have been characterized as a very overt act of alliteration. A third book had just come out, and had been favourably reviewed in two or three newspapers, on the strength of which Mrs. Brooke had set to work harder than ever, and rarely left her study.

Dr. Brooke had not many relations living, but all of them pitied him for having such a bad wife, and spoke their minds most freely; but their remarks did not trouble the gifted authoress, for she said her time was much too valuable to spend in dwelling on the silly speeches of people who had nothing else to do but talk of their neighbours, and locked herself in her own room. The indignant relations had, therefore, no opportunity of speaking their minds to her, for she only saw them when her

husband and niece were present. Miss Lettice still lived at Austerfield, but her aged father and mother were dead. Little as she knew of the world and its ways, she too said it was a shame that Olive was not 'taken out.' So said Mrs. Ullathorne also, and when Mrs. Ullathorne said anything she meant it. She was Dr. Brooke's eldest sister, ten years older than he was—a widow, and an ill-tempered one. Her husband had been a merchant in Manchester—a self-made man, who had died leaving more than a quarter of a million; and now his wife lived in Kensington Square with Miss Cochrane, an oppressed worm of a companion, who turned, not on her employer, but on everyone else.

Mrs. Vincent Raymond, another sister of Dr. Brooke's, said the same thing. 'It was a great shame to keep a pretty girl like Olive imprisoned in a dull, dingy, dark Harley Street house; she ought to be introduced and taken everywhere.' Mrs. Ullathorne sniffed indignantly when she heard Mrs. Raymond say that Olive ought to be taken everywhere: 'everywhere was worse than nowhere! Mrs. Ray-

mond was far too fond of going to houses whose owners did not care whether she was dead or alive.' Mrs. Raymond, who was the wife of a country gentleman, and still lived on the reputation of having been a beauty, smiled at Mrs. Ullathorne's old-fashioned folly, but dared not let her see that she did so, and said she would get her dear brother Chesterfield's permission to take Olive to Court—the child would have to be presented, and the sooner it was done the better. Mrs. Ullathorne said she might write and make the offer, but Sister Raymond must know very well that, even if Chesterfield liked the idea of having Olive presented in his absence, and wrote to consent, he would quite forget to send a cheque for her equipment, and was Sister Raymond prepared to incur this expense herself? Mrs. Raymond looked disconcerted; she and her husband had been counting on Mrs. Ullathorne to manage that part of the business, and meekly she said so. On which that lady laughed her to scorn, and declared that when she spent money, she spent it on sensible things, and not on a few dozen yards of silk to put in a train for the

benefit of court milliners. 'I'll give a dinner and ask her,' said she, 'and that will be introduction enough!'

'Oh, sister! Really?'

'I have said it, and I mean it,' repeated Mrs. Ullathorne. 'I'll give a dinner-party.'

Then clear in Mrs. Raymond's mind's eye rose up a vision of that dinner, which she well knew would be but a reproduction of many another dinner of a dulness, and heaviness, and oppressive ponderosity which had left their mark on her for life. 'And you will invite?'—she began, though she well knew that Mrs. Ullathorne would invite her stock-broker and his wife, her doctor and his, her favourite clergyman and his sister, a couple of friendly barristers, the Brookes, the Raymonds themselves, and Dr. and Mrs. Ullathorne from the East-end because they were relations; and having given poor Olive the doubtful enjoyment of their company, and the opportunity of refusing two soups, two fishes, four entrées, and a number of other dishes provided with equal amplitude, she would relax her efforts, and Olive's life would then be as lonely and

dull as before, only darkened by the memory of this ghastly dinner.

‘I am the one who ought to have the child,’ cried Mrs. Raymond. ‘Chesterfield ought to make me a handsome allowance; he is quite able to do it. I’d take her everywhere, and have her well married before the end of the season.’

‘You!’ cried Mrs. Ullathorne with scorn. ‘And you’d settle her down with some one like your own precious husband. No! I tell you, no! Have I not informed you that I intend to introduce Olive myself, and that I’ll give a dinner-party? so that, surely, may be considered as settled.’

None of the Brooke family dared to resent anything that Mrs. Ullathorne said, for she was very ill-tempered, and could defend herself, and besides, there was the quarter of a million, and she was known to be looking out for an heir to her wealth amongst her nephews and nieces. She openly proclaimed that she could not reconcile it to her conscience to leave her money to anyone out of her own family, but that she despised and disliked every member of it.

‘Well, dear,’ said Mrs. Raymond, ‘it is settled. You shall give the first party, since you wish it.’

‘I don’t wish it,’ cried Mrs. Ullathorne snappishly. ‘I never said I did; I do it entirely from a sense of duty. Olive must be introduced to society by one of us, and my society is the only society worth knowing. Yours suits you and your husband; you know best—at least, you don’t, but you won’t listen to me.’

Mrs. Raymond smiled good-naturedly, and said again, ‘And you will invite—?’

‘Well, Olive of course, and Richard Brooke and that scribbling goose of a wife of his, and you and your—and your husband’ (for once she considerably omitted the descriptive epithet which she felt to be so appropriate), ‘and your two boys—and tell them not to come smelling of tobacco-smoke—and Mr. Reynolds,’ &c.; for she did but name the names Mrs. Raymond had foreseen.

‘Sister,’ cried that lady, eagerly, ‘if you like to give me some money to spend on Olive, I’ll buy her some pretty evening dresses: Selina has such vile taste.’

‘I am poor,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne, ‘very poor. Besides, who knows what calls I may have on my money, or how long I have to be here? Sister, I sometimes think my time will be very short. Miss Cochrane and I were at Finchley Cemetery the other day—she went to see some silly old woman’s grave which she wanted to shed a few tears over—I forget whose, and it is no matter, but there is such a pretty bit of ground there, in one corner—I like a corner to be buried in, and so I’ve bought it for myself, and who knows how soon I shall be lying in it?’ and Mrs. Ullathorne hung her head.

‘But that bit at Merrifield you got Vincent to buy for you! Have you forgotten that you said you liked the idea of being buried near some of the family, and I suppose we shall have to be buried there when our time comes, as Vincent is Squire.’

‘No, I’ve not forgotten; I’ve changed my mind, that’s all,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne grimly.

‘But you bought a bit at Bonchurch; you said that was the prettiest graveyard you had ever seen.’

‘ Well, so I did ; but I think I like better to be nearer town, and I fancied this corner place. If I have wasted my money, Sister Raymond, you need not mind—I don’t suppose it will make much difference to you—at least, your boys will have to change a good deal before I leave what I have to either of them.’ And as she said this, Mrs. Ullathorne, a grim, grey woman with stony-looking features, sniffed contemptuously, and drew herself up in her high-backed chair, and pitilessly watched the distress of the fashionably dressed, but somewhat faded little beauty of a sister, who had so much need of this money of which they were speaking.

‘ I am sure that both my boys are very anxious to please you, they really are, if they only knew how. Sister, it really is rather difficult. I often wish you would speak plainly, and tell me what it is that you want altered in them.’

‘ They want altering inside and out, before they will suit me,’ replied Mrs. Ullathorne.

‘ But, at any rate, you don’t like any of the other nieces and nephews better ? ’

‘ No, I detest all my nieces and nephews

but Olive, and I am not fond of her. But I suppose I shall have to choose one of them for my heir. I'll not make my will, though, till I see the rest of Chesterfield's children; how many has he? I declare I forget.'

'Oh, you won't care for them; you know you don't like foreigners; they must have been ten years at Lausanne.' All Olive's younger sisters had been brought up in a school at Lausanne.

'That's enough of itself to bring a curse on Chesterfield's children,' said Mrs. Ullathorne. 'That's just enough, without anything else.'

'My dear!' gasped Mrs. Raymond, surprised to the top of her bent.

'Don't my-dear me,' cried Mrs. Ullathorne; 'I am not in my dotage yet, to want petting. Don't I know what I am talking about? I am quite aware of the value of words and of thoughts too, which is more than some people who shall be nameless are—what I mean is this, and what I will maintain is this,' and here Mrs. Ullathorne unconsciously adopted the tone and manner of the clergyman under whom she had sat the last time she was at church, and

began to thump the table just as he had thumped the cushion: 'that if our Maker for His own wise purposes caused people suddenly to begin to speak a variety of different languages, it was because He did not wish them to understand each other; and if ever He had changed his mind about it, and had thought that they had better know what they were saying to each other, it would have been very easy for Him to make them all speak the same language again. So, Sister Raymond, what I am maintaining, and will maintain, is this, that when you begin to teach your children, your sons and your daughters, to palaver in foreign languages just as if they were natives, it is flying in the face of their Creator. The world was made by design, and one of our Maker's principal designs was that people should not understand each other.'

Long as Mrs. Raymond had known her sister, she had never yet grasped the fact that all her opinions were the outcome of an overpowering desire to contradict everything that was said to her. She had no fixed belief in the theory for which she had just contended at

such length, and was capable of taking the contrary line five minutes afterwards, as Mrs. Raymond quickly discovered when she joyously exclaimed, 'My dear boys were plucked because their Greek and Latin were so bad, and when they turned to modern languages they did not get on a bit better ; both of them came to grief just the same.'

'Just like them !' cried Mrs. Ullathorne, wheeling shamelessly round. 'Just exactly what I should have expected of them ! They make their father pay a great sum to send them to College to learn something, and when they are there, can't be persuaded to open a book.'

'But——' began Mrs. Raymond.

'Sister Raymond, be quiet with your buts ; let us get the dinner settled.'

The sincere and hearty impulse of everyone invited to the Ullathorne dinner was to send an excuse and escape it. Mr. Raymond, who well knew that his sister-in-law set her guests down to an incendiary sherry and indigenous champagne, prosaic food, and dull discourse, hinted at a previous bachelor engagement ; but that attempt at evasion was instantly quenched

by his wife, who thought him a lunatic to run any risk of offending her rich sister. The two young Raymonds, however, flatly declined to go; not even the prospect of a quarter of a million of money, with added savings, would tempt them, as they declared, to place themselves for so many hours under the shadow of that great upas-tree of a woman who spread desolation on all around her. They both declared that they were more likely to get what they wanted by staying away than by going, but, in any case, eat that dinner of dismay and dreariness they would not!

Oh, the incredible dulness of that evening! No one dared to be himself—no one, indeed, would have been allowed to be so for five minutes. Each guest disapproved of the other mentally and morally, and no topic was introduced which had not been worn threadbare for years. Selina, the gifted, shrank into herself. Once she thought of making a study of the entertainment, and of using it in a half-written novel; but Dr. Brooke had so emphatically ordered her to keep her pen from revelling in the peculiarities of his family, that she dared not disobey him. The Doctor was the only

one who said a good thing ; he told an excellent story, and much he suffered for it afterwards, for it was one on which his wife had set her affections for her book, and she had begged him not to use it. ‘You might have left me my story, Richard ; you promised me that you would,’ said she.

‘I am sorry I forgot ; but mind you, Selina, a clever wife makes a very stupid husband ! You want everything for your novels ; you have cramped my language for five years already, with your “Do remember that, I want to use that ;” “Be sure not to tell the other.” When will this tyranny be over-past ?’

‘The story was too good for them ; I never was so bored in my life !’ She was silent for a while, and then she cried, ‘Richard, do tell me how long Mrs. Ullathorne will live. You, as a doctor, ought to have some idea.’

‘Live ? Why ? What do you mean ?’

‘She would make my fortune if I could use her, she would indeed. She is so preternaturally ill-tempered and disagreeable. She would be admirable in the novel I am doing, quite admirable.’

‘And you want to know how long my sister will live, in order to——’

‘Don’t be angry, dear Richard ; you know everything ought to give way to art.’

Dr. Brooke screwed up his lips, and thought that in his house most things did do so.

‘Is all going out like that?’ asked poor Olive.

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Dr. Brooke, who was ill and tired. ‘All visiting bores me.’

‘Don’t make me go to any more parties,’ said Olive ; ‘I like home best.’ So she did, and gladly made herself useful to her aunt in any way she could. Many a long chapter of ‘The Fateful Fortnight’s’ swiftly coming successor was copied by her, and many a gap in housekeeping filled by her, and no sigh was given to society, for she judged society by what she had seen at Mrs. Ullathorne’s.

Two or three weeks afterwards, Olive had an opportunity of seeing another aspect of the world and its ways. The Raymonds were going to the Derby. Mr. Raymond was a member of the Four-in-hand Club, and had made up a party for the day, or rather, had let his

wife do so. Mrs. Raymond at the last moment persuaded Mrs. Brooke to allow Olive to go. She was not sure that the Doctor would quite approve of races for her, but Mrs. Raymond was his own sister, Epsom was in the country, and Olive would breathe pure air, see country lanes, and enjoy them ; so she went. She enjoyed herself thoroughly, but when she was relating all the adventures of the day to her uncle and aunt late in the evening, no sooner had she mentioned the names of some members of the party, than Dr. Brooke started to his feet, seized the poker, and broke into a dozen splinters the large piece of coal which was innocently reposing in the centre of the fire in which he as an invalid indulged. Then he exclaimed, ‘ Lady Norah Denistoun, did you say ? Mrs. Beevor Haynes ? You are quite sure of the names ? ’

‘ Quite sure, Aunt Raymond told me them.’

‘ And they went to Epsom with you ? ’

‘ Yes, uncle, why not ? ’

‘ Why not ? But it is of no consequence ; only, really, I should have thought your aunt

Raymond might have known better.' Then he sat down again and was quiet, and did not seem to hear the rest of Olive's story of her day, and certainly did not hear Mrs. Brooke say, 'Why, dear little Olive, you will turn out a perfect godsend to me, for you shall tell me all about these gay places and things, and help me to no end of good descriptions.' If such was her hope, it was cut short at once when Olive went to bed. 'Selina,' said he, 'I am master of this house, and I must assert my position; I insist on two things; one is, that you never again allow Olive to go anywhere under my sister Raymond's chaperonage; and the other is, that you at once renounce this habit of shutting yourself up, and go out sometimes in the evening with the child. If it is right for her to go out, it is right she should go under the care of a proper person. Mind, I insist on it.'

'But, Richard, what does this mean?'

'It means that that fool or knave of a woman Esther Raymond has taken poor dear Olive out for the day in the company of two divorced women. I feel as if I could never

‘speak to her again!’ Mrs. Brooke was shocked, very much so; but soon her prevailing feeling was, that it ‘was a great pity Olive had gone out at all, girls were best at home.’

‘No, no! she is *nineteen*, and she ought to see something of society. It is a duty we owe to her, *and* it shall be performed; but she shall *never* again be exposed to meet such persons. Esther Raymond ought to be ashamed of herself!’

Esther Raymond was not, and said, ‘Vincent asked them, but in society you meet all kinds of people; I am sorry about it, of course, but it can’t be helped now.’

‘You don’t meet divorced women,’ persisted Dr. Brooke.

‘At any rate, you meet plenty of people who ought to be divorced;’ and then she added that it was well known that Lady This and Mrs. That were twice as bad as those poor women Richard was so angry about. She did not approve of such women, of course, but what could she do? However vague her feelings on this point were, they were sharpened to keen precision the moment Mrs. Ullathorne’s name

was mentioned, and she was asked what she supposed Sister Ullathorne would think of it?

‘Richard!’ cried she with painful eagerness. ‘You surely will not be so unhandsome as to tell her! You would do me and mine a serious injury if you did! She has such ridiculously rigid ideas, poor woman!’

‘Her ideas are mine,’ said Dr. Brooke coldly.

‘We have no right to judge,’ said the lady.

‘Yes, we have, when the case has been judged for us; but I won’t say anything to Mary.’

‘Thank you. You are always kind.’

‘I don’t know that. As long as I live, I shall resent what you have done! To take a young, inexperienced girl—a girl situated, too, as poor dear Olive is—to such a place, with such a party!’

‘I was there,’ said Mrs. Raymond, thinking that fact disposed of all objections; but Dr. Brooke could not see it. He went home and confronted his wife in her den. ‘Have you any invitations for the evening, at present?’

‘Oh, yes, numbers.’

‘Let me see some of them.’

‘Well, dear, yes; but, you see, I hardly know where they are. I generally use them to write on.’ And she turned over her papers, and behold, fragments of her novel, ‘The Ominous Oath,’ were scrawled over the backs of invitations to dinners and evening parties.

‘But you answer these, I hope?’ said the doctor.

‘Oh yes, I answer them all in time; indeed, those I write on are more likely to get answers than those I put in the rack. They catch my eye more.’

‘Now, dear Selina, will you oblige me, and, for the sake of doing your duty to my brother’s child, give up your “Ominous Oath,” or whatever your new novel may be, so far as to accept two invitations weekly?’

‘Not dinners, Richard!’ said Mrs. Brooke with a thrill of dread in her accents.

‘No, not unless you like—at least, not dinners only. Surely you, a woman of ability, might make such things useful professionally.’

How Mrs. Brooke did enjoy those words! but, he might have said a woman of genius—

ability was such a poor half-and-half word. She soon remembered that he was her husband, and therefore would not like to use such big words when speaking of herself; so she smiled on his proposal, and began to say and think that perhaps she had misused her opportunities.

‘Take her to concerts, theatres, and evening parties. I am sure you have any amount of invitations.’

‘And I may go where I like?’ inquired Mrs. Brooke.

‘Yes, you are not like Esther; go where you like.’

CHAPTER VIII.

How singular is the thing called pleasure !—*Tempest*.

Old fashions please me best.—*Taming of the Shrew*.

MRS. BROOKE did go where she liked, and very soon she was surprised to find how much she enjoyed herself. She picked and chose amongst her cards of invitation, and by preference sought the society of literary folks, painters, and musicians. ‘When I have got all I want from these,’ said she, ‘I will cultivate people of another kind. I am rather afraid that Richard is right, and that I have narrowed my sphere of experience too much.’ She had led such a secluded life, that she was intensely astonished at all she saw now that she did begin to go out; but she found constant inspiration for her pen and food for her thoughts.

‘Whither away, dear lady?’ said her hus-

band as she left the domestic hearth one evening, no longer reluctant as of old.

‘Oh, to such a delightful party, Richard—oh, I am so glad I got an invitation! You ought to come with us—I know you would enjoy it.’

This party was at the house of Messieurs Willoughby and Langton, two of Mrs. Brooke’s favourite young poets, and no one was to be there who was not either already distinguished or certain to be so. There were poets, and novelists, and artists, and musicians, and ladies who looked as if they had walked out of pictures (of a certain school, be it well understood); but no man was to be seen who had not, in the judgment of the hosts, made good his claim to be of the select few dowered with genius. Youth, however, was the predominating feature of the party—youth and intense hopefulness. All were going to do great things. Here were the men who had a year or so before published the volumes of poems which everybody spoke of at the time as so marvelously full of promise, and on all sides were heard whispers of the beauty of the poems they

were now writing. Some had seen the MS. of Clifford's last sonnet. It was 'absolutely perfect!' A rondel by some one else was 'simply too lovely!' 'And Chesterton's play, did you hear that, when he read it to a select few? Well, there was no doubt of that making its mark.' Then there were musicians who sat down and sang you ballads of their own writing set to music of their own composing, before whom the path to undying fame seemed to stretch itself forth, broad, smooth, and straight; and painters whose forthcoming pictures were to revive the glories of the Turner and Sir Joshua time. Some of the band had, it must be confessed, met with slight reverses and discouragements in their various branches of art, which were to be naturally accounted for by the jealousy and blindness of 'the dull and commonplace men' who held the entrances to the Temple of Fame, but the sufferers were too young and too strong in hope to care for such reverses, or to let them cast more than a passing cloud on their lives. Their energy was undaunted, their trust in the future unwavering, and their handsome faces were full of the pride

of health and delight in the work which they had set themselves to do. Edward Willoughby, the elder host, had lavished worlds of thought and fancy on the entertainment, which combined all the beauties and singularities of the most advanced Pre-Raphaelite household, with a dash of fairyland to lighten it. The floors were covered with Indian matting and Persian rugs, while a coarse sacking, gilded, stretched dado-wise all round the walls, made a mellow background for Indian and Japanese cabinets and low divans covered with gorgeous silks and embroideries. To these divans each lady was with much ceremony and respect led as she entered the rooms ; and when she had taken a seat, a heavy-headed flower was placed in her hand, which she graciously held. Heavy-headed, too, were the fair ladies who thus came in, with hair frizzed and rolled, and twisted and filleted with gold or silver, or parti-coloured bands under which a few flowers were naïvely stuck, in frank confidence in their own power of either arranging themselves, or lending adornment without any arrangement. Most of these fair guests were clad in soft white or faint

blue or amber dresses freakishly made ; tight where other people would have had them loose, or loose where it might have seemed more convenient to have them tight. They fell in pretty folds, and looked creamy and delicate, and not extravagant in the quantity of material used. None of these ladies sat very upright ; all lounged and lolled a little ; some stooped forward like the water-lilies in their own hands when stalk and stem began to grow limp. Some arranged themselves in wistful and sentimental-looking curves, which reminded—that is to say, would have reminded anyone who did not enter into the feeling of the assembly—of the letter S. All had lovely fans, nearly all had necklaces, either of spotted and poisonous looking beads, or flat ones which seemed as if they had been lying crushed out of shape for centuries in some far-away and forgotten tomb, or else their necks were encircled by beads of some strangely tender blue-green or cloudy amber.

Langton and Willoughby had decorated the rooms and settled how everything was to be ; theirs was the idea that each lady on her arrival was to be presented with a heavy-headed flower.

First, they were to have water-lilies ; then, when these drooped and failed, they were to have tulips, then clove carnations, and last of all roses. Langton and Willoughby kept the store of flowers and periodically went round and renewed them, and as they took the discarded flower from the ladies they threw it on the floor. This was a strong point with them ; all these flowers were manifestly to live and die for their pleasure and that of their guests ; when done with, they were to breathe out life at their feet.

Before anyone came, the floor had been thickly strewn with rose-leaves, fair, pale pink rose-leaves ; there they lay, and amongst them were sprinkled carnations and pinks which gave forth perfume when stepped on. Then upon the ebony cabinets were glasses of eschscholtzias, all put there for the sake of seeing them open their fiery golden hearts and then droop lower and lower over the edge of the glasses which held them, and die in the glow of light and heat which had at first made their joy. The gentlemen of the party were to have no chairs, or seats on the sofas ; cushions were spread on the floor on which they might sit or

kneel, and they could bury their hands in the cool, soft rose-leaves lying there and win scent and refreshment from their touch. Having made up their minds to give, for once, a party entirely after their own Pre-Raphaelite hearts, Willoughby and Langton had not invited anyone who was not likely to enjoy the vagary of the moment to its fullest extent. There were not more than forty guests in all, and Mrs. Brooke was the only person present who had any weight of years to bear. She had made some effort to get an invitation, and was loud in her admiration of all she saw. It was perfect!—And they must allow her to describe the party in one of her books, exactly as it had taken place. If Mr. Willoughby or Mr. Langton said she must not do so, she was afraid she could not help disobeying them. It was impossible not to attempt to describe a thing which made such a strong impression as this did on her. She had heard of ‘treading out fragrance, breathing perfume,’ but she had never dreamed of such a realisation of the poet’s words as this. No wonder Mr. Willoughby’s verses and Mr. Langton’s plays were so full of colour and sweetness if this was

their ordinary way of living ! Did they always live in this way ? It was too delightful ! For her part, never again would she give any party without having every carpet in the house so thickly covered over with rose-leaves that no one could see one thread of it ; and if roses were not in season, she would have something else—flowers of some sort she would have—that is, if her husband would allow her. On this Miss Poingdestre (the champion of more than one cause which requires some energy and endurance in its supporters, and who had strayed into this party rather against the will of its donors)—Miss Poingdestre, who balanced her flower in a way which taxed all the resources of its stalk, was heard to mutter her opinion that ‘if a husband had a voice in such a matter as that, it was just like the rest of the way the world was managed, and the sooner——’

Mrs. Brooke never waited to hear the end of that dark saying, she was far too happy to be damped by Miss Poingdestre or twenty like her, and she passed on from the flowers and the leaves to some groups of fans and a long row of plates transfixed in endless agony and made to

show their pattern to all beholders, whether they would or no, held in the perpetual grasp of wires. She marvelled at the quaintness of their effect, and was heard to declare that, come what might, she too would have fans and the same arrangement of plates. Then she caught sight of a bit of embroidery, and then she wondered where Olive was, for embroidery of this kind would lend a grace to the dull Harley Street study, and Olive's nimble fingers could easily produce it; but no Olive was at hand, and Mrs. Brooke saw things on all sides which made her forget she had wanted her. She caught sight of another room where there was a dado composed of tender wavy lines, which to those present forcibly conveyed the idea of water, in which were swimming fishes of all sizes and shapes and markings, and here and there a water-plant emerged, or a water-loving insect hovered. The walls of this room were the bluest of things green and the greenest of things blue. There were no plates, no pictures, no fans, but in a corner, so as to avoid all the dark errors of a love of symmetry, or proportion, or composition, flew a host of white

butterflies. They crossed the corner diagonally, and were beautifully painted. 'How lovely!' cried all. 'How decorative!' 'So rightly put in!' 'There's a touch of genius in the boldness of that design.'

'You like the flutter-bugs, ma'am?' said an American poetess who had just written some verses on the beauty of one of the rivers of her own land as it squirmed through meadows green.

'Indeed I do,' replied Mrs. Brooke, nothing daunted; 'but all is charming! And I have been content with wall-paper at six shillings the piece, put on by a man who asks for beer if you peep in to see if it is going to look well.'

'If you like rooms done up in this way,' said Mr. Willoughby, 'why not get yours done? Those Harley-street houses turn out very well. You would have to change your furniture, but you could soon do that. I can tell you of a fellow in the Seven Dials who can let you have a set of first-rate chairs. They are Chippendale, and the finest I have seen for years, beautiful without bombast—absolutely beautiful.'

'Can I remember that?' thought poor bewildered Mrs. Brooke. 'I ought to have Olive

near me to help me to remember these things. "Beautiful without bombast" would make my fortune, but I shall forget it, I know I shall. Where is Olive?'

She peeped through a chink between a gaunt Chippendale stand for a flower-pot, which had one tall arum on it, and a screen rescued from some lumber-room to make the delight of her present hosts, and saw Olive talking to a good-looking young man. She looked interested, and Mrs. Brooke benevolently resolved to leave her alone.

'I am inclined to agree with you,' Olive's new friend was saying. 'I think you are quite right in feeling that if a picture is intended to represent nature, it should be like nature. I know Morrison holds that opinion, and I like his pictures better than anyone else's.'

'Morrison! Willie Morrison!' cried Olive eagerly. And then she blushed deeply and said, 'Oh, I beg your pardon. I was thinking of a little boy I knew long ago.'

Mr. Denbigh—that was his name—smiled and said, 'I believe my Mr. Morrison's name is William—indeed I am sure it is.'

Olive breathed quickly.

‘You want to know if he is the Mr. Morrison you used to know?’

‘Yes,’ said Olive; ‘I want to know—I am most anxious to know—I will tell you why, afterwards.’

‘I am afraid I can’t give you much information. I was introduced to my Mr. Morrison two or three winters ago in Rome—he was painting there. I was always expecting him to catch Roman fever and die; for he used to drive out across the Campagna every fine evening to watch the sun set. That is a deadly thing to do in winter, or indeed at any time. I warned him, and he wouldn’t be warned; but after all, I was the one who caught the fever—not he, and he nursed me through it.’

‘You said drive out—the Willie Morrison I knew was very poor.’

‘Oh, this one was not poor. I do not know what he had, of course, but he lived in the same way that everyone else did. He was an artist, but he never sold pictures when he was there, so he must have had money. He was a good deal in society, though he did not care for it.’

‘It can’t be the same,’ said Olive sadly, for her poor Willie was not likely to be spoken of thus. ‘Tell me what he was like.’

‘He was good-looking, tall, had dark hair and bright hazel eyes, and was about twenty, I think, and that is some years ago.’

‘But it must be the one I **knew**—I really think it is.’

Olive looked **so** interested that he said, ‘I will **tell you** more about him. Let me see. I never knew anyone so fond of poetry—he wrote beautiful poems himself.’

Olive shook her head. ‘No, it is not the same. The one I knew was poor and not in society, and hated poetry—positively hated it.’

‘I am afraid I can tell you no more,’ said Mr. Denbigh, ‘except that he was a capital fellow and very kind to me. My Morrison, for so I call him to distinguish him from yours, used to be thought an excellent artist in Rome; his work is not much known here, but he has lately been made an Associate of the Old Water Colour Society, so if you go to their gallery you may see it.’

‘Where does he live?—In Hanway Town?’

‘Hanway Town? oh dear no! Not that I know where he does live, though, for he is always sitting on open moors and mountain tops.’

‘And what are his relations like?’ she asked very humbly, dreading what the answer might be.

‘I don’t think he has any. I know he has neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor sister. His name is William Keithley Morrison—I had forgotten that.’

‘That settles the question—I knew he was not the same. The William Morrison I knew, had no other name. He was poor and had a poor father and mother. I knew him when I was a very little girl long ago in a country village, where my grandmother let me play with him. I suppose I ought not to have played with him, but it was very nice.’

He smiled, and she added, ‘I ought to tell you that I have never seen him since I was a little girl of nine.’

‘It is a pity that I cannot help you to find him again. My friend has some very marked peculiarities. He is a fellow who likes his

work better than most people like their play, and grumbles when he has to go into society. He ought to have been here to-night—perhaps he is coming. Don't look startled.'

'Don't let him know how I have questioned you, if he does come. I have bored you with it for nothing, for the moment you said he was fond of poetry, I might have known he was not my old friend.'

For weeks after this evening at Mr. Willoughby's, Mrs. Brooke did nothing but bring sap-green things and sage-green things, and tiny pieces of rigid furniture into Dr. Brooke's house. Wall-papers of this soothing mildness of colour, with botanical specimens printed on them to enliven them a little, were stretched on walls which had hitherto known only French papers of satin sheen and golden lustre. All the curtains and cornices, together with the festoons and cords and tassels thereto appertaining, were torn down and replaced by plain poles from which depended severe lines of crushed velvet, sap-green serge, or even rural Bolton sheeting. Then came a change as complete as that which annually befalls the pictures

in the Salon. All the drawing-room furniture was sent up to the garrets and the nurseries, and the garrets and nurseries were rifled for chairs, tables, and corner cupboards, which were now discovered to be perfect in taste, though years before they had been consigned to these distant regions with contemptuous wonder at the ugliness of the things the Brookes contrived to leave behind them when they died. Unmanageable sideboards and sofas now once more stretched their huge length along the rooms below; backless seats offered their hospitality to admiring guests. Pictures **which had been** wrought by the aged Brooke grandmother in her childhood now came to great honour; a line engraving copied touch for touch in black thread on white linen once more saw the light, and was called 'highly interesting;' while an angel rising heavenwards with its face and hands painted in water-colours, and the rest of it embroidered in white silk, was brought down-stairs again, and once more soared where it could be seen. Hand-screens, fire-screens, and 'bell-pulls' worked a hundred years before, and hidden out of sight for fifty, enjoyed a new life,

and on all sides was heard the cry of 'New lamps for old ones.' Meanwhile Mrs. Brooke was as busy as a swallow, which eats, drinks, bathes, and feeds her young, flying. She superintended all these changes herself, writing a passionate page, and then hurrying away with all speed to see that no mistake was made in her furnishing, then back to her pen, only to be summoned from it to watch her floors being stained, or to meet some gentleman in solemn consultation in order to find ways and means to cope with the difficulties of corniced ceilings and white marble mantel-pieces. The work progressed; purchases were many, and soon every corner of the rooms became almost uninhabitable by reason of small overturnable tables and tall stands with what Mrs. Brooke believed to be priceless china on them. Dr. Brooke had at first been much pleased to see his wife 'come to her senses and go out;' but every time she went out she came home with some new idea, and all her ideas were so large, and took shape with such promptitude and decision, that he was appalled.

'My dear,' he sometimes said ruefully, 're-

member that I am not a rich man. Who is to pay the bill?’

‘I’ll pay the bill, Richard. I have just discovered that we can sell the dining-room mantel-piece—great big, ugly thing that it is—to a man who is collecting for France. We can get 200*l.* for it. The mantel-piece will pay the bills, dear.’

‘The mantel-piece is expected to pay its own weight of bills, I see,’ observed Dr. Brooke, drily, and turned on his heel; but he came back to say, ‘Where are my pictures?’

‘Oh, don’t regret your pictures; I have been forced to send them into the back bedroom. They are not decorative—they quite throw the tone of the room out of harmony.’

‘I should like to know what you mean to hang up that will look better than my Turners and Prouts.’

‘Only wait, dear; you will see; I am sure you will approve. I mean to treat myself to a few Persian and Rhodian plates, and hang them on the walls; we can afford them, you know, if we sell the mantel-piece, and they will look jolly.’

‘“Jolly!” dear.’

‘Yes, that’s the right word to use. Professor Saville used it to me only last night.’

‘About plates, Selina?’

‘No, about pictures. He said the Botticellis at Burlington House last winter were extremely jolly; but it is right to use it in speaking of china as well.’

‘Well, you’ll tire of all this, I hope,’ said Dr. Brooke, and departed. His house was not the only thing which was changed. Mrs. Brooke dressed herself artistically. Sometimes she was a mature Mary Queen of Scots, sometimes a Catherine de Medicis with a forbidding and murderous hood. Then Olive was made to wear skimp, limp, Indian muslins, and Mrs. Brooke sent down to Aunt Lettice for all the old buckles and combs and waistbands and lace fichus that could be found lingering in the lumber-room at Austerfield, and attired in these she went out. Mr. Ambergreen painted her in the contorted attitude of a mediæval saint, and the picture was sent to the Dudley Gallery, and was hung beside other damsels of the same kind and much applauded, and Mr. Ambergreen helped Mrs. Brooke to find her

way into the inner recesses of shops in Hanway Street where she bought all kinds of antique ornaments of small intrinsic value but great strangeness, and these were hung about Olive with marked success, and wherever they went these were discussed and admired. Olive, too, was much admired, but not so much as these uncouth decorations, and both she and Mrs. Brooke were perfectly happy. Dr. Brooke was not so happy. He began to think that the last state of Selina his wife was worse than the first. He did not like the rigid outlines of his new home. He did not like the ladies of his household to make such frights of themselves. He had an affection for his old engravings and dignified water-colours ; he did not think that china plates were ever intended to be hung up as pictures, or feel that they supplied enough food for his eye's worship. He hated cliquism and collectors' talk, which always ends by dwelling on prices paid, and bores you to death by its sameness. He remonstrated with his wife. Nothing checked Mrs. Brooke. She even went down on her knees to show the maids how to polish a floor.

‘Surely you might employ your time better, Selina,’ said he one day when he found her doing this.

‘I know you think I ought to be writing,’ said the gifted lady (Dr. Brooke made a wry face); ‘but manual labour promotes the flow of ideas. Ruskin and I both think that, and Charlotte Brontë too: she said that she never wrote so well as she did after she had been black-leading a grate.’

‘There is a lady in the drawing-room who wishes to see you, ma’am,’ said the servant, coming in at this moment.

‘Who is it?’ asked Mrs. Brooke. John did not know. The lady had asked if Mrs. Brooke was at home, had come in, and had refused to give her name. She was young and pleasant-looking, and seemed to know the family. ‘You go, Olive,’ said Mrs. Brooke. ‘I want to see this bit of work done, for after to-day I can spend no more time on this room—I ought to be writing.’

‘But look at my dress,’ said Olive. ‘It is not fit to be seen. It is dreadfully tumbled with kneeling on the floor.’ She was rubbing

the floor with a silk handkerchief. Mrs. Brooke thought that better economy than 'employing so many men to do things.' Her dress was made of the butcher-blue linen which Helbrunner sells. It fitted her as Pre-Raphaelite dresses do. It was long and plain, and confined only by a band fastened by one of Aunt Lettice's old buckles. Artists admired it, and liked her hair as it was in a bushy fuzz, but the taste and fashion of the day were dead against them ; but that makes it sweet to wear such raiment.

'Oh, go as you are—you look very nice, and people have no right to come so early!' said Mrs. Brooke, who steadily refused to disturb herself. Olive ran down. A very fair, smooth-complexioned, light-haired, blue-eyed, calm-looking, and still handsome woman of seven or eight-and-thirty rose to meet her as she entered doubtfully, for lady visitors were rare at 350 Harley Street. The stranger smiled encouragingly, stepped forward gracefully, took Olive in her arms, pressed her soft cheek against hers by way of bestowing a kiss, and said, 'Dear child, you do not know me—I am your mother.'

CHAPTER IX.

Are these the breed of wits so wondered at ?

Love's Labour's Lost.

OLIVE at once ran to tell Mrs. Brooke, and Mrs. Brooke at once hurried to the doctor. ‘Richard,’ said she in an urgent voice, ‘Chesterfield’s wife is here! here in the drawing-room with Olive! I am just going to her, but please promise me not to invite her to stay with us.’

Dr. Brooke looked as if he heard a singularly unwelcome bit of news. He seemed bewildered, and as if his thoughts were in the past rather than the present. ‘I invite her, Selina!’ said he at length.

‘Well, don’t, dear, that’s all! I could not have her here. I should not get a stroke of work done if she were here.’

A loud peal of the bell warned Dr. Brooke that he had no time for home life; but what

was his surprise at luncheon-time to find that Selina herself had invited Lady Brooke to stay with her until she had either found rooms or a house! Lady Brooke, in the quietest and most natural manner possible, had conveyed to Mrs. Brooke that she thought it a privilege even to speak to a woman who had written 'The Fateful Fortnight,' not to mention 'Evelyn's Entanglement' and 'The Ominous Oath.' Lady Brooke could allude to scenes and quote passages, and relate how the Governor-General had made her pretty speeches about being connected by marriage with such a popular author, and then she could dwell on the pleasure it had given her to see the reading folks in India revelling in these books and to find them even in Ceylon when she went there for a change. Lady Brooke asked to see the study where her dear Selina wrote, condoled with her on the interruptions of her daily life, and said what a privilege she should esteem it if she could but be near her to ward off some of these attacks on her peace, and sometimes be rewarded by hearing a freshly-written chapter read for the first time.

‘Oh, thank you,’ cried Mrs. Brooke; ‘not many women are like you. As a rule, they take upon themselves to despise me! In fact, the very worst of novel-writing is, that every silly woman of your acquaintance, who could not produce a book even to save her life, considers that she is your superior because she does not try to do it.’

Mrs. Brooke was a good deal won over by her sister’s sympathy, and as she was thoroughly warm-hearted and liberal, and, besides that, often in want of a listener, she ended by saying, ‘But do come here. Do stay here until you have some settled place of residence.’

Lady Brooke explained that she had left her husband for a while because of her health. She had paid a flying visit to Lausanne and her girls, had slept one night in Paris, and had not written because she wanted to take Olive by surprise, but now she was going to stay in London for a while—perhaps even for a year. ‘The worst is, dear, that I am not well provided with this world’s wealth,’ said she. ‘Chesterfield gave me some hundreds, and would have given me any sum I liked, but I

had not the heart to let him waste his money on me.'

'You won't take Olive from us?'

'I am afraid I must. I should like to go into society a little with her, and then, I trust, she will see some one whom she can love and marry.'

Mrs. Brooke sighed and said, 'I have been taking her into society. I have chosen what I think you will agree with me in preferring to any other—that of writers and painters.'

Did Lady Brooke make a wry face? If she did, Mrs. Brooke did not see it, and Lady Brooke made haste to say, 'Oh, charming! I am so glad you have taken her among people worth knowing, the only people, in fact, who are worth knowing. We in India have little chance of seeing any interesting folks of this kind. We have newspaper correspondents now and then, or a man comes to see the sun do something or other; but except these we have nothing beyond our usual set. It is a great loss!'

'But,' said Mrs. Brooke innocently, 'if you care about society of this kind, why not go

with us to the Millennium Club? You will see everyone there. There is a great mixture, of course, and the entertainment is rather rough, but everyone there is somebody.' Then Mrs. Brooke explained that the Millennium was a club of very advanced thinkers indeed, who five or six times a year invited ladies to their meetings and gave them oysters and sauterne, or the more potent beverage of brandy and soda-water. Lady Brooke's eyebrows arched themselves a little, but she seemed very enthusiastic about going. 'And now,' said Mrs. Brooke, 'as John has taken a cab to bring your maid and your luggage, come into my study. We shall be alone all the afternoon, so I can make a good beginning and read you the novel I am now busy with. No one is likely to interrupt us; besides, I will take measures to prevent it.'

'That will indeed be delightful!' cried Lady Brooke, who began to repent having accepted her sister-in-law's hospitality. 'Quite too delightful!' Nature has a way of stepping in when the human frame is undergoing a pain which is too much for its power of endurance,

and rescuing us from its clutch by a timely fit of unconsciousness. Lady Brooke may have slept a little ; she could not have slept much, for Mrs. Brooke, when reading, had a trick of darting a glance in search of sympathy straight into the eyes of her listener when any especially admirable passage occurred, and in her estimation this was frequently the case. They sat till dinner, and then, alas ! when, worn out and feeble, listener and reader sat down for physical refreshment, the fish was not boiled, because the man had just brought it ten minutes before the dinner-hour. Mrs. Brooke had for a fortnight been going to scold him for his unpunctuality, and had always forgotten. The meat, too, was half-roasted, because cook had only got a fire at all by brushing up the last shovelful of dust in the coal-cellar and using that in combination with some dozens of firewood which had been got in in a large quantity as a measure of economy. Mrs. Brooke had omitted to order coals. Then the pudding had not set because there was no heat in the oven, and finally a cheese soufflet came up looking in no wise different from a badly made

baked batter pudding, 'and all because the pore cook was so flustered like,' said John. Dr. Brookeⁿ pushed his plate away and said it was not wanted. He was cross with his wife, but presently he had to go away to a meeting.

'Such things will happen,' said Mrs. Brooke suavely. She considered it very unworthy of people capable of immortality (by means of literature) to care much for creature comforts. 'I am not too tired to go on with our reading, Honora,' said she, 'if you are not too tired to listen?'

'I could listen for ever,' said Honora, and they went to the study. Olive went off to the piano in the drawing-room: she knew her aunt's works by heart.

It was late before the reading was over. 'Later than it ought to have been,' said Mrs. Brooke, 'for we have to breakfast at eight. I am sorry for you, but you see you have come to stay with working folks.'

Next morning, Lady Brooke—who perhaps found eight o'clock rather early—sent a message to her hosts to say that, as she had a headache,

she would stay where she was—in bed, and would only take a cup of tea.

She had her wish, and presently Mrs. Brooke came with her MS. ‘I don’t mind giving up the morning to read to you, dear, if you think it will amuse you.’

‘How truly kind!’ said Lady Brooke. ‘You won’t mind my lying with my eyes shut? The light rather hurts them, you know.’

She did keep them rather tightly shut; an unfeeling enemy might have said that she was asleep. So it went on all day, more or less. Joys were rare, unless listening to MS. novels was one.

‘What about the Millennium?’ said Mrs. Brooke. ‘Honora, are you well enough to go?’

‘Oh yes, thank you,’ said Lady Brooke, for she knew that if she did not, Mrs. Brooke would stay at home and read to her.

‘We won’t be particular about dinner, as Richard is going out,’ continued Mrs. Brooke.

Lady Brooke, judging from the evening before, thought that she was not very particular

when he was in. She sighed gently, for it was pleasanter when people were particular.

‘How shall I dress, dear Selina? I did get a couple of dresses made while I was staying in Paris; but they are very plain ones.’

Mrs. Brooke did just notice that there was a slight discrepancy between the fact that Lady Brooke had had time to get two dresses made in Paris, and the other fact, previously communicated, that she had only slept there one night to rest a little; but Mrs. Brooke was a very good, unsuspecting woman, and thought there was a mistake somewhere; so she only said, ‘You can wear anything at the Millennium. When Sister Ullathorne uses that carriage of hers, which is seldom, she always says she puts on a halfpenny head and a farthing tail, for no one sees her skirts. That’s the right way to do at the Millennium, for no one likes to be too well dressed there. You see, the people drop bits of biscuit and sandwiches about, and throw glasses of wine over you; it is such a crowd, and your dress gets so marked, it is spoilt. Put on an old black dress. That’s what I do.’

That is what Mrs. Brooke did, and her

sister-in-law did not like the effect; and when Olive came down in the last lunacy in artistic attire, Lady Brooke shrank back in horror. It was a horror which was speechless, or she would have said, 'You are not going out such a fright as that, child?'

'Yes, isn't it lovely!' cried Mrs. Brooke, wholly misunderstanding the effect produced. 'I never saw a sweeter bit of colour than she is, and *so* artistic! I like those puffy sleeves immensely.'

'Only, they are not puffy enough,' said Olive. 'What is the use of having puffy sleeves, if they are not puffier than everyone else's?'

'But,' cried Lady Brooke, 'do people wear dresses of that kind? I saw nothing like them in Paris.'

'The really artistic people wear them. Olive has a dress you will like far better than this. It cost nothing at all but the price of a little silk for the pipings. It is made out of two old scarves of her grandmother's, and whenever she puts it on you have no idea how it is admired. There never was a time when it

was so easy to dress. You really can wear anything.'

'But,' said Lady Brooke aghast, 'are you really going out in that—that dress? Won't people stare?'

'Oh dear, yes! but when one knows how beautiful the dress is——'

'You see, I am fresh from an outlandish country,' said Lady Brooke, who felt ready to sink into the earth with dismay.

At first sight the Millennium did not seem a place likely to be especially haunted by the Muses. You entered a low doorway in a wide and fashionable street, and made your way up a narrow paved court. Then you climbed a steep flight of stairs, and when you were half-way up you heard the croaking roar of the human voice in brisk general conversation. The club room was quite full. Well-dressed and ill-dressed people crowded beneath the large centre gaselier—most of them standing. Pretty women and clever men were there in plenty; Liberal M.P.s; exiled Communists to whom the right hand of fellowship had been freely extended; leader-writers; essayists; poets,

young and old ; men who wrote in 'Mind,' and women who read 'The World,' together with ladies who wanted to have a share in managing it ; reviewer and reviewed,—all rubbing shoulders, and talking as if talk were the first object of their existence.

'Oh, good Heavens !' ejaculated Lady Brooke, as, half-deafened with the din and fainting with the heat, she sank into a chair which had lost a foot.

'Isn't it pleasant ?' said Mrs. Brooke joyously. 'I'll tell you who all the people are. It is a very good gathering to-night, I can see.'

'Most striking faces !' said poor Lady Brooke.

'Yes ; you do not often get so many remarkable people together in the same room.'

Lady Brooke groaned inwardly, for the noise utterly bewildered her ; but she composed her features to the semblance of a decent smile.

'Honora,' said Mrs. Brooke presently, 'do you know that there are seven men in this room who are under sentence of death—ex-Communists, you know !'

Lady Brooke's most fervent wish was that some one would quickly come and see that the sentence was carried out. 'Indeed, dear!' she said drearily. It was getting too much for her. She took a practical view of life. She had a daughter to marry, and did not want to select an ex-Communist, or any of the people whom she saw there, unless they were better off than they appeared to be.

'Who is that talking to Olive?' she asked.

'Sir John Ellerton,' said Mrs. Brooke, and looked another way as if nothing more could be said.

Lady Brooke did not think so.

'He seems to enjoy his conversation with her,' she continued.

'He always does. There is nothing in him, though; he is very stupid.'

'But is he one of the Yorkshire Ellertons?'

'Yes.'

'But they are all very rich?'

'Yes. I fancy this young fellow has a very large fortune. I am very glad of it, for, poor fellow, he has nothing else to boast of.'

Lady Brooke was one of those persons who,

when they hear of anything good which seems within their reach, immediately try to see if a little of it cannot be induced to flow into a channel which will benefit themselves. She thought Selina an apathetic idiot, but she did not say so. Her eyes turned to Olive and her companion. They were three chairs off.

‘Selina, we ought to know something of a young man who talks so much to Olive. Is he——’

‘Oh, he is a very good sort of fellow, but so dull—at least, so unintellectual. He wanted me to ask him to something or other at our house, but I had not the courage. We should have been bored to death. Rich people are always stupid, I think.’

Lady Brooke ran her eye meditatively over her sister-in-law’s face. Here was a woman with a full complement of senses acting like an idiot. The sight was so curious to her that she lingered over it a moment before saying,

‘Introduce me to him, dear. Let me see what he is like for myself.’

Sir John Ellerton, a clear, bright-eyed, handsome Saxon, looked kindly in the face of the

lady who was, as Olive's mother, so interesting to him. He found a thousand things to say to her which Mrs. Brooke would have cut short in a moment as trivial and dull. Lady Brooke thought his conversation as good as anyone else's, and was very glad he did not talk of books and book-makers. He had plenty to say, though he did not discourse on high matters ; and he was evidently a good, warm-hearted fellow, and, what was still more important to her, he had taken a great fancy to Olive. What was to be done ? If only Lady Brooke had a house of her own, or even rooms to which she could invite him, she would soon see that this affair came to a proper and profitable conclusion ; even now she heard him fishing for an invitation from the obtuse or obdurate Selina, with a persistence which that lady totally disregarded ; and if she herself gave one, or found an excuse for bringing him to call, there would be a troop of high-art decorators in the only room at liberty for his reception, or Selina would tell her servant, ' Not at home to anyone to day, John ; I can't be disturbed on any account whatever.'

‘Did you not see that that young man was doing his best to get your leave to call?’ said she.

‘Yes, I fancied he wanted an invitation; but what is the use of letting him come to our house?—we are not in his way.’

‘But suppose he has a fancy for Olive?’

‘What a pity it would be! I am sure she would never care for him.’

Lady Brooke shrugged her shoulders. She wished she had money enough to hire a nice house at once. She had been two days with her sister-in-law, and did not think she could bear to stay many more.

CHAPTER X.

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city square.

ROBERT BROWNING.

Many who keep their chambers are not sick.

Timon of Athens.

‘MAY I come in?’ said Lady Brooke next day as she tapped at the door of the sacred study. ‘I have not come to disturb you, dear Selina; I would not run the risk of spoiling a chapter for the world. I have only come to say that I am going to pay my respects to Mrs. Ullathorne, and I want to beg you to be very careful if you see her, for—don’t be shocked!—I am not going to tell her that I have been in London since Tuesday evening. I shall let her think I came yesterday. I won’t exactly say I did, you know: but I dare not confess to Tuesday, when I have kept away from her until to-day, and it is Friday. She would never forgive me.’

Mrs. Brooke looked as if she did not under-

stand. She was not a manœuvring woman, and she was deep in a thrilling scene.

‘I only came to ask you not to betray me if anything is said. I dare not offend Mrs. Ullathorne, Chesterfield would never forgive me if I did,’ added Lady Brooke.

‘I never see her,’ said Mrs. Brooke. ‘At least, very seldom. She won’t ask me when you came.’

‘Well, leave it vague if she does. I must go. I wish I could stay with you. I should like nothing better than to sit down, pen in hand, and let you dictate to me some of the beautiful thoughts I can see your mind is full of. Good-bye. I won’t waste more of your time. I wish Mrs. Ullathorne would take it into her head to go into the country, and let me have that nice house of hers rent-free.’

‘I wish she would,’ thought Doctor Brooke who came in at this moment and heard the aspiration. He did not like Lady Brooke. He had been a changed man since she came into the house—watchful, constrained, and silent.

‘What do you want, dear?’ said Mrs. Brooke, when alone with her husband; ‘I am in

the middle of something so important, and do so want to get on. Honora thinks she does not disturb me, but she does.'

'You won't have Honora long. You heard her say that she wished to have Mrs. Ullathorne's house, and depend upon it, if that is the case, she will soon have it. Honora has an odd knack of getting her own way. If you were a wise woman, Selina, you would not go on spinning characters out of your own brain when you have that woman in the house to study from. She is wily, insinuating, unfathomable—I wish she was out of my house!'

'Oh dear Richard, how wrong you are! "wily, insinuating, unfathomable." She is as simple-minded and straightforward a woman as I have ever seen, quite natural and open—she has a kind manner, that's all. I am a novel-writer, and have to study character, so I ought to know. I can't think what makes you take against her so; besides when she does go, she will take Olive with her; don't forget that.'

Dr. Brooke sighed and said, 'This has come so suddenly. I knew we should have to part with Olive some day, but one does not like to

give her up to that woman ; it is a sin to let her have the keeping of the child—a sin and a shame. I have a great mind to resist it.’

‘Impossible ! And, Richard, you are unjust to her ; she is very kind, and——’

Dr. Brooke would not listen to any praise of Honora ; he ran away without explaining the business that had brought him, and Mrs. Brooke sighed and said to herself, ‘If only husband, and house, and children, and friends would abate their tormenting power for one short half-year, I could write a book which would prove that I had a perfect right to ask to have my time to myself ; but it is of no use to wish for such a thing.’

Lady Brooke went straight to Mrs. Ullathorne’s, and as she drove up the Bayswater Road her eyes rested longingly on the handsome houses which rear their tall height by its side, and her mind was filled with visions of all that she could do if one of these were but placed at her disposal for a time with a suitable income. ‘How the want of money checks one at every turn !’ thought she. ‘And I dare say the people who live in these houses, and have

more of it than they know how to spend, don't make one half quarter so much use of their chances as I should.' The Lancaster Gate houses were rather large, but still she could have made one do ; the Saint Catherine's Villas were rather small, but not too small for a clever managing woman like herself. 'It would be such a comfort,' thought she, 'if I could marry off Olive while I am here. It would put an end to all Chesterfield's worrying. I must make a great effort to do so. I do not see why there should be any difficulty about it. She is very pretty, and people seem to find her charming. I wonder she has not got engaged long since. It would have been curious enough to see the husband Selina would have chosen for her. I should most likely have had to dismiss him.' While occupied by these thoughts, she reached Kensington Square. A sulky-looking parlour-maid opened the door and took her upstairs. Mrs. Ullathorne was sitting on one side of the fire and Miss Cochrane on the other. They were talking in a very excited manner about something or other, and one—the one who dared to do it—turned an irate eye on Lady

Brooke for thus disturbing them. ‘My dear sister Mary,’ cried Lady Brooke, ‘I have not lost a moment in coming to you. Chesterfield said, “See all my family, Honora, but see my sister Mary first.” Poor Chesterfield! He does not forget.’

‘Oh indeed!’ said Mrs. Ullathorne. ‘So you are here, Lady Brooke! Well, why have you left your husband?’

‘My health gave way. Sooner or later, everyone feels that Indian climate. But I shall not stay long in England, I shall soon rejoin my husband.’

Two or three inquiries followed, but Mrs. Ullathorne evidently took little or no interest in Chesterfield or in the state of his wife’s health. ‘You look radiant,’ said she, resolved to treat the matter exhaustively; ‘you say you are ill, but here in England, when people say they are ill, they don’t look like that. Now, I am ill, really ill, and am likely to be worse—much worse. Troubles and vexations vexations and troubles, and people taking a part against me who ought to be the very first to stand between me and all annoyance’—here she darted a crushing

glance at Miss Cochrane. 'It's the way of the world, I suppose; I was always told that if I wanted to be ill-treated, the best way to secure what I wanted was to be very kind to some one, for the people you were the kindest to were always the first to turn against you! I never believed it before, but now I see it is true.'

'It is not true!' cried Miss Cochrane. 'You are unjust to me.'

'I am not unjust. I am ill-used and worried and driven out of my very senses by servants and all the vexation that having them implies, and you, Miss Cochrane, you always take a part against me—you are always on the servants' side, that you are!'

Miss Cochrane began to weep silently; Mrs. Ullathorne looked angrily at her and continued: 'Well, I shan't be here long, that's a comfort—the only comfort that I can see.'

'My dear, dear Mary,' cried Lady Brooke, 'what is the matter? Tell me. I am sure poor Miss Cochrane is most anxious to please you.'

'I bought a vault for myself at Finchley the other day,' said this Juggernaut of a woman,

still driving on, 'and it won't be long before I am in it, and then many who shall be nameless will wish that they had behaved differently while there was time to do so; that they will, to a certainty.'

'Oh, do stop,' implored Miss Cochrane, but Mrs. Ullathorne would not. 'Stop, please stop,' again wailed the companion; but when, on the contrary, she saw Mrs. Ullathorne's lips begin to move despitefully, she ran in her despair towards the door.

'Now, if you meet that woman, be so kind as not to go on taking a part against me,' cried Mrs. Ullathorne, pursuing her with one last shot. Mournful sobs followed this final act of aggression. Mrs. Ullathorne sniffed angrily, and turned to Lady Brooke and said, 'I don't like relations, but perhaps even relations are better than companions!—humble companions who put their nasty little horns out behind your back when they think they can do it safely. I'll never forgive Bessie Cochrane! I would tell her to pack her boxes and go, only I am so afraid of being left quite alone, and she knows that, and presumes—actually pre-

sumes—to take the servants' side. Servants are never in the right. It is nonsense to say they are; they are not educated.'

'Of course it is nonsense,' said Lady Brooke, who did so wonder what all this meant.

'I never had a better servant than that woman who opened the door to you,' said Mrs. Ullathorne. 'Never! I hate her, but she is a good servant. She is as punctual as clockwork—thoroughly clean—quick, clever, and kind—and if she goes, I should not know what to do. Besides, that is not the worst; she and the cook are sisters—they came together, and they'll leave together; and if they do, I'll give up housekeeping and have no more servants, for before these came I never had a moment's peace—no, never! Dirty, wrangling, thieving women came into the house and made me uncomfortable for a week or two, and then went away, and worse came in their place! No, if they go, I'll sell my house and furniture and live in an hotel—I will indeed.'

'But why do you think they are going?'

'I am sure they will go. I offended them his morning before luncheon, and they are

only waiting to see me alone to give me notice. That parlour-maid will give me notice this afternoon, and the cook to-morrow morning, and Bessie Cochrane is on their side !’

‘Oh, but if you want to keep them we must stop them going,’ said Lady Brooke. ‘Tell me more about it, and I will see what can be done. I am very clever at contriving.’

‘I always thought you must be, or you would never have caught Chesterfield,’ was on the tip of Mrs. Ullathorne’s tongue, but self-interest restrained her : nothing else would have done so. ‘I’ll tell you what happened. It was such a little silly, simple thing. I was getting something out of a closet near the head of the back stairs this morning, when a most delicious smell of cooking came upstairs. It was so good that I could not help saying to that sulky woman who let you in—she was helping me to look for something—“Oh what a good smell ! What nice things they are cooking in the kitchen ! I do hope that they mean to let me have a taste of them !” And she sniffed and tossed her head indignantly, and I saw in a moment I had said something

wrong, and she cried out that she was "quite sure no cooking was done that I was not aware of, and that it was very unpleasant to be suspected, and I was always suspecting one or other of them; however, she should make a point of going downstairs at once and asking her sister what she had been cooking, and if it was anything I had not ordered." I begged her not to do this, but she said, "Good old servants that had been five years in a house hadn't ought to be suspected of doing things underhanded. That there wasn't no credit in serving suspicious ladies who went sniffing about to know what the kitchen dinner was. That she, for her part, didn't care how soon she made a change in her servitude, and that she'd be bound for it her sister would feel the same;" and so she will,' said Mrs. Ullathorne, 'and I am miserable about it, for the cook is the best cook I ever had in the house, and they are both as good women as ever lived.'

'Say that you think so—they will soon forgive you.'

'No, that is not my way. I can scold a person when it is needful, but I don't like to

run and put a patch on next minute. I can't lower myself in that way.'

Lady Brooke was silent a moment; she was puzzled.

Miss Cochrane came creeping in, the unwilling bearer of bad news.

'Mary has just gone out. I was looking out of the window in the dining-room, and saw her go, looking very black and determined.'

'She has gone to the registry-office,' cried Mrs. Ullathorne—'gone to seek a place, and has left the kitchenmaid to spoil our dinner.'

'I met Hannah on the stairs a minute since, and she begged me to ask you if you would kindly speak to her for five minutes in the breakfast-room, if Lady Brooke was spending the afternoon.'

'She wants to give me notice. What an unfortunate woman I am! Honora, can't you help me? I'd give five hundred pounds to keep them.'

'Less would do it,' said Lady Brooke.

'I can't humble myself.'

'No, you can't; leave all to me. I have an idea. Miss Cochrane, will you kindly con-

trive to see Hannah, if that is her name. Do not say you gave her message to Mrs. Ullathorne, but say that her mistress looks very ill—very ill indeed. Please say that, and appear very much alarmed. Do it well.’

‘Now we must act a little,’ said Lady Brooke, when she was gone; ‘pretend a little, I mean.’

‘I don’t understand. I can’t act or tell lies,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne.

‘Who can?’ cried Lady Brooke, aghast. ‘I would not on any account do such a thing. You must just pretend to be ill. When servants think you are ill, they are angels. Have you never noticed that? They won’t say an unpleasant word to you if you follow my advice.’

‘I am ill—there need be no pretence about that—very ill. This has quite upset me—quite!’

‘Well, then, lie down on your bed. I will cover you with rugs and draw the blinds down, and Miss Cochrane will keep the door locked, and see that no one disturbs you.’

‘Oh no, I can’t do that! Besides, they will only give me notice to-morrow instead of to-day.’

‘I’ll secure you against that.’

‘Oh, no, no. I really——’

But at this moment Miss Cochrane came nervously in and said, ‘Hannah knows you are ill, and she still wants to see you. She says she won’t detain you more than five minutes. Not when Lady Brooke is here, of course. She will wait till she leaves.’

‘But I can’t leave when Mrs. Ullathorne is feeling so ill,’ said Lady Brooke. ‘I am going to get her to lie down a while. Will you please send off one of the under-servants in a cab for the doctor? Tell her to make the greatest possible haste.’

Miss Cochrane went.

Mrs. Ullathorne looked obstinate.

‘What is the use of this? They can easily wait till to-morrow. They can say all they want to say in the morning.’

‘But get the doctor to order you abroad for two or three months. They will like being left alone in the house, and the moment they hear that there is a prospect of it they will say no more about leaving you, and when you come home you can go on as if this had never happened.’

‘What a clever woman you are!’ exclaimed Mrs. Ullathorne.

‘Oh no! I am only straining every nerve to help you. If we can but keep them both away from you until the doctor has ordered you to go from home, all danger is over. I am quite sure they won’t give up their places after they have heard that. You must be quick, though. We must act a little.’

‘Bessie Cochrane will tell them. She is in league with them,’ cried Mrs. Ullathorne, though she did not quite believe what she was saying.

‘Then, we will only tell her what we want them to know,’ said Lady Brooke composedly.

‘Oh, you clever woman! you clever, bad woman!’ thought Mrs. Ullathorne.

To lie down on a bed and look ill involved no acting on her part. She did feel ill, though she would not have dreamed of going to bed unless Lady Brooke had proposed it, nay, more, had not talked her into feeling more and more of an invalid in real earnest. She looked wretchedly ill when Lady Brooke had arranged her a little, with a white handkerchief round her forehead, and had darkened the room.

Preston, Mrs. Ullathorne's maid, was own cousin to Mary the cook and her sister. Lady Brooke kept her out of the way, therefore, until all preparations were made. Then she was brought and saw her usually truculent mistress lying thus, pale, faint, and apparently speechless.

'She seems very ill,' said Lady Brooke, taking her aside. 'She says she wants to be left quiet until the doctor comes; but I wish you would stay with me; I am afraid to be alone with her, Preston. I know she likes you about her. She often named you in her letters to India. She seems to think so very highly of you.'

'Keeps her fine words for her letter-writing, then, as it seems,' said the aggrieved Preston. 'I am sure I don't know about her high opinion of any of us. It is just the other way, I think!'

'Oh, don't mind a sharp speech now and then,' replied Lady Brooke. 'She has a high opinion of you, I am sure.'

'Well I am not going to say anything to put her about to-day when she is ill, but to-morrow morning me, and Hannah, and Mary the

cook, we are all going to give her a month's notice ; we are resolved.'

'Well, you must do as you like, of course, but say nothing to-day. She is not a young woman, you know ! Sometimes a very slight illness turns out very seriously with a person of her age. We are all here to-day and gone to-morrow, and if you were unkind to her, and then found she had died, leaving you all large legacies, it would be very painful to you. Persons of her ample fortune generally do provide for their servants, and I imagine you will find yourselves well remembered.'

The doctor came. Lady Brooke saw him, gave him his cue, and took him into the darkened room, where Preston sat on one side of the bed and Miss Cochrane on the other. He uttered a number of medical commonplaces which seemed to mean a great deal ; said he was glad he had been sent for at once, for he could, he thought, ward off all danger, and further declared that, if Mrs. Ullathorne could but go abroad a while, she would soon be herself again. Kreuznach was the place he recommended. Could Mrs. Ullathorne start in a day

or two—the sooner the better? It was of the utmost importance that she should lose no time.

Mrs. Ullathorne looked at Preston.

‘You can soon prepare your mistress’s things, I know,’ said he encouragingly. ‘And you, madam—you can go? You have no arrangements to make which need detain you here? You have trustworthy people in the house?’

‘Oh, most trustworthy,’ replied Mrs. Ullathorne.

That did not seem strong enough to Lady Brooke, who said, ‘My sister has been telling me how fortunately she is situated. She has two sisters who have been with her a long time, and she could leave her house for any length of time without the least anxiety—they are so thoroughly to be trusted. Did you not say so, Mrs. Ullathorne?’

‘Yes, I did. It is quite true—thoroughly true.’

‘Very few are so fortunate,’ said the doctor.

The maid’s face grew brighter, and he continued :

‘Then you will go to Kreuznach, and stay

there till you feel better? I will give you something which will cure you of this attack, but you won't be really well without a thorough change. I do not mean to confine you to Kreuznach. After you have been there a while you might go somewhere else. I suppose you will be in no hurry to get home?'

'Oh dear no! I am very fond of travelling when once I get away.'

So that was settled, and he went, and Preston escorted him to the door.

'But if those two women still give me notice?' said Mrs. Ullathorne. She spoke very feebly; Lady Brooke's little bit of acting had had a most comical effect on her: she now firmly believed that she had narrowly escaped an extremely dangerous illness.

'Oh, they won't. They will be only too glad to have a holiday. Just think what a fine thing for them your going away will be! They will practically be the mistresses of this charming house, and will have no work to do.'

'I like people to have work to do,' growled Mrs. Ullathorne faintly.

'Well, I dare say it is better, both for their

bodies and minds ; but if they have none, they can do none.'

Presently Mrs. Ullathorne looked up and said, 'I have been thinking over all you have been saying about their enjoying their holiday so much and being mistresses of this house.'

'Yes, poor things ! it will be a nice rest for them.'

'I like what we have done so far as keeping them is concerned, but I don't like the idea of leaving this house so completely at their mercy. They could fill it with their own friends if they liked—no one would ever know.'

'There is that to consider. But you trust them so implicitly.'

'H'm ! Only so far—I trust no one thoroughly : that's the best way.'

'Then it does seem a pity we have arranged this, for of course you leave a great deal in their power.'

'I don't think I'll go. Dangerous as it may be for me to disobey the doctor's orders, I really do not think I'll go,' said Mrs. Ullathorne.

'Then they will.'

'Oh, dear ! is all that to begin again ?'

‘Is there no one whom you could ask to stay here—who would see that they went on quietly and took care of your house and furniture? Would the Raymonds do? They come up to town, don’t they?’

Mrs. Ullathorne forgot she was an invalid, and started up.

‘Honora! I have not quite taken leave of my senses! The Raymonds would be worse than any amount of bad servants! They would destroy everything I have in the house; they would dance in it, and smoke, and alter the furniture. No, whatever it costs me, I’ll not leave home.’

‘There is Selina. She could come here once or twice a week and see how things were going on.’

‘Scribbling goose! Do you think her supervision would be valuable?’

‘Dr. Brooke might have some patient who would take your house for a month or two.’

Mrs. Ullathorne shook her head. ‘I will stay where I am. I’ll not leave home.’

‘Would you like me to come here while you are away? I was intending to pay a series of visits, but I would gladly give them up if I

could be of any service to you. Would it make you more comfortable to have me here?’

‘That might do,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne doubtfully; ‘but you would run away to your visits as soon as my back was turned, and leave the house to take care of itself.’

‘Oh, no, dear; I promise you, if I come, I will never go away for more than a day or two, and not at all if you object. I should live very quietly, of course—very—I have no power of doing otherwise. Chesterfield and I have children to provide for.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne benignly, ‘if you decide on doing me this favour, I shall be very much obliged to you—very. I won’t forget it.’

‘Oh, I would gladly do more than that for you.’

‘And you will keep a sharp look-out on the servants?—the best of them require that. These are good enough—admirable in some ways—but you never know.’

‘No, indeed, you never know,’ said Lady Brooke, and Mrs. Ullathorne thought her a most sensible woman.

‘You had better not say anything to them about my coming, until after you have left. Write to them from Paris. If they don’t give you notice to-morrow, they won’t do it at all. I’ll take care to do nothing to put them in a bad humour.’

‘I pay their wages, of course, while I am away,’ said Mrs. Ullathorne, ‘and I should have had to give them board wages, so you must allow me to pay your housekeeping too. You had better let the cook provide all you want, and it can go into my account with her. She is economical and full of contrivance, so it will make very little difference to me at the end of the year.’

Very little difference to Mrs. Ullathorne, but all the difference to Lady Brooke, who was by no means able to live as she liked.

‘You are sure, Honora, that you won’t discover in a week or two that you have made an arrangement that is very inconvenient to you? I want you to be quite sure you can go through with this.’

‘I am quite sure. I am certain.’

She was certain And well she might be,

for she had been gradually leading Mrs. Ullathorne to make her this offer ever since she entered the house.

‘And now I have got a good house over my head, and good servants and food provided for the next few months, I ought to make some use of my luck, and I will try,’ said Lady Brooke to herself as she went home. She frisked into the study—what were pen-and-ink heroines to her now, that she should feel for them? She frisked gaily in and said, ‘I am going to keep Mrs. Ullathorne’s house for her. She is ordered abroad for her health, and I am going to Kensington Square till she comes back.’

Olive, who was copying a MS., looked up ; she was afraid she would have to go too.

‘You won’t take my Olive away?’ said Mrs. Brooke, who loved her niece dearly.

‘I will ! I must ! I shall !’

When Dr. Brooke heard what had happened, he asked for five minutes’ conversation with Lady Brooke. ‘I have not much to say,’ said he, when she appeared, ‘but Selina tells me that you wish to take Olive away from us for a

while. She is like our own child now, and I almost think we might have been allowed to keep her. Chesterfield insists on it, I hear.'

Lady Brooke, who was never quite at her ease with Dr. Brooke, showed him a letter from Chesterfield in which he said, 'I wish you to take Olive to live with you while in England. Thank Richard and Selina most heartily for the great kindness which they have shown her, but tell them that we must now resume the care of her. I feel strongly on this point, as you know, and must be imperative in my request.'

'He need not be so,' observed Dr. Brooke with much suppressed feeling. 'He might have left her here. She is like a child of our own to us, and it would have been better for all concerned.'

Lady Brooke did not speak. She perhaps thought her husband's letter had spoken for her.

'Well, I have one request to make, Lady Brooke,' (he never called her Honora). 'Promise me most solemnly that you will keep from Olive all knowledge of certain circumstances

(you know what I refer to) which would give her pain. We have always done so. She knows nothing of them. Promise this solemnly.'

'I do promise most solemnly. She shall never learn them from me.'

CHAPTER XI.

With silken coats, and caps, and golden rings,
With ruffs, and cuffs, and farthingales and things;
With scarfs, and fans, and double change of bravery,
With amber bracelets, beads, and all this knavery.

Taming of the Shrew.

‘I WISH your Aunt Ullathorne had felt it to be one of her duties to buy you four or five pretty dresses,’ said Lady Brooke, one day, soon after she had taken up her abode in Kensington Square.

‘But I have just had two new ones,’ said Olive. ‘They were made the week before you came home.’

‘Oh, you can’t wear those hor—— I mean, those dresses would not look well here. You require a Pre-Raphaelite house to make a Pre-Raphaelite dress look well,’ said Lady Brooke, who was careful not to be too outspoken. ‘I must see what I can do for you. I wish your

papa would get into the habit of writing larger cheques for me.'

Mrs. Raymond was coming to luncheon. She had been spending Easter in Rome, and had just returned. She entered while they were speaking. 'You can't think, Honora,' said she, 'what a weight your being here removes from me. It is so dreadful to know that coming to London means going to see my sister Ullathorne. I would rather walk ten miles than do that, and I hate walking.'

All the time Mrs. Raymond was speaking, her eyes were straying to Olive. Presently that young lady left the room. 'Honora,' said Mrs. Raymond hesitatingly, 'I want to say something to you, but before I do so will you answer one question?'

'Yes.'

'How do you like Olive's style of dress?'

'I do not like it at all. I can't endure it!'

'Then, I need not be afraid to speak. What I wished to say was this: I think it perfectly hideous! Dressed as she is, I would not be seen with her for any money! It is Selina's taste, I suppose?'

Lady Brooke made a rapid sign in the affirmative. She could not trust herself to speak of this family misfortune.

‘Well, I recommend you to make a bundle of all Olive’s dresses and to treat them as Carlyle is said to treat his pipes.’

‘How?’

‘They say he allows himself the indulgence of a new pipe every day, but as he does not like to throw the discarded one quite away, he always puts it on the step of his door at night—it is gone in the morning.’

‘Ah, how I should like to do that! But how am I to re-equip her? Dresses cost money. Would you believe it!—I only afforded myself two when I was in Paris, and they were nothing to look at, but they came to more than a hundred and twenty pounds!’

‘I know,’ murmured Mrs. Raymond feelingly; ‘and men think that we can look well for nothing. I suppose you want to get Olive married?’

‘Yes; Chesterfield is very anxious to do all he can for her. I hope she will marry.’

‘I do not wonder at your wishing it. It is

extremely desirable for a girl situated as she is to get married as quickly as possible.'

Upon this the two ladies had some private and confidential conversation, during the course of which they made an arrangement for next day which resulted in Lady Brooke's saying to Olive next morning, 'I want you to look your very best. Aunt Raymond is coming for us at two o'clock. Be ready to go out with her when she comes, and please take great pains with your appearance. Let me see: put on that navy-blue dress, and calm down your hair a little.'

'Where are we going?'

'You will see when the time comes. Run away and get ready, and don't hurry your operations.'

Mrs. Raymond came. She inspected Olive most carefully. She altered her hair a little, gave some amicable twists and turns to such articles of attire as were movable, bade her get into the carriage, and said, 'She must not sit with her back to the horses, Honora—not in going, I mean; that often makes even a good-looking girl turn so white that she seems posi-

tively plain.' So Olive was judiciously placed, and they set out. She felt that the eyes of these two ladies were fixed on her without intermission. They were criticising her most minutely and weighing her in some worldly balance. To what distinguished personage was she about to be presented? 'Do say where we are going,' said she imploringly.

'To make a call,' was the only answer she obtained.

'Can you come with me for one moment to Madame Filoselle's?' said Mrs. Raymond; 'I want to speak to her, but I won't keep you a moment. Exmoor Street is not out of your way.'

'Of course we will come. We like going to a milliner's—don't we, Olive? You and I have not the talent to write books like dear Aunt Selina; we must have some employment for our minds.'

They rang at Madame Filoselle's bell, and were shown into a handsome drawing-room, where there was little to reveal that lady's calling but two or three books of patterns bound in Russia-leather. Mrs. Raymond said

a few words about some dress she had ordered, and then she drew Olive into conversation. Olive was turning over a book of patterns.

‘Which would you like, if you were asked to choose a dress for yourself?’

‘This,’ said Olive, pointing to a pretty creamy white texture, something between silk and gauze.

‘If I had been asked to choose a very becoming dress for Mademoiselle, that is the very dress I should have picked out,’ said Madame Filoselle.

Olive looked at it regretfully. Such dresses were for the rich and great. ‘And that is pretty too,’ said she. This time it was a nondescript willowy-green.

‘Very pretty,’ cried all three.

‘But they are all pretty,’ said Olive; ‘far too pretty to look at unless one is able to choose two or three of them.’

She put the pattern-book down.

The milliner was watching her as narrowly as the two ladies had done erewhile.

‘Couldn’t I have a bonnet like my new dress?’ said Mrs. Raymond. ‘I must be *en suite*.

Have you any bonnets I could look at to see which shape I had better decide on ? ’

She carelessly strolled into the other room as she spoke, and though she was passing a series of bonnets in review, Olive saw that she was talking earnestly all the while. Presently by a slight gesture she summoned Lady Brooke.

‘Sit still, Olive,’ said that lady. ‘Aunt Raymond wants me for a moment, I see ; but I would rather you stayed here. Rest, dear.’

‘Oh, for the formidable interview which lies before me,’ thought Olive. ‘I was beginning to forget about that.’

She watched her mother and the two others as they talked and fingered the bonnets. After a while they left the room.

Madame Filoselle was the first to return.

‘We have been arranging about a dress for you, mademoiselle. One of my ladies will take your measure.’

‘A dress for me !’ cried Olive, astonished, for she had had a great many of late.

‘Yes, mademoiselle. Pretty ladies look all the prettier when they have well-made dresses.’

The ‘lady’ came, and in a minute or so

Olive's measure was taken. . A tape round her shoulders, a tape round her waist, another to give the length of her arm, and the thing was done.

‘And now sign your name here, mademoiselle,’ said Madame Filoselle—‘here, at the bottom of this page.’

What this page contained Olive knew not, for a piece of blotting-paper hid it. She looked inquiringly at her mother.

‘It is usual, dear,’ said Mrs. Raymond, and Olive signed, and then her mother and Mrs. Raymond added their names. After this they left, and Mrs. Raymond and Lady Brooke seemed to forget about the call, the prospect of which was now once more so alarming to Olive, and ordered the coachman to turn into the park. Olive was glad of the respite, and soon forgot her fears. It was late in April, and the weather had been very cold that year. All the buds had been long in coming out, but were now thrusting forth their tender heads and, seen from afar, looked like a delicate golden-green mist. ‘How pretty it used to be at Austerfield when the buds first began to come

out, and how delighted Willie and I used to be with them ! How we used to like to pick the sticky little sycamore leaves out of their rosy pink sheaths ! How tightly they were packed up ! I believe Willie and I could have sat all day peeping into the little contrivances flowers and leaves have for taking care of themselves. After all, it was a very nice way of spending our time. I have never been so happy since. I wish——’ Here Olive’s meditations were interrupted, for she was struck by the repetition of the word ‘court dresses.’ ‘Court dresses ! What were they talking about ? Court dresses for whom ? ’

‘ You say you will get yours from Paris,’ said Mrs. Raymond, ‘ and I think you are right, if your woman is in the habit of making for you ; but Olive’s will have to be made by Madame Filoselle. I dare say she will do it as well as anyone.’

‘ *I* going to court ! ’ cried Olive.

‘ Hush ! ’ cried Lady Brooke. ‘ Don’t begin to talk about it until it is all arranged.’

Olive felt herself snubbed, and turned away to look at her buds again ; but she could not

confine her thoughts to them as before, and when she tried to divert them to Austerfield and Willie, it did not seem so nice to sit and pick sticky sycamore leaves out of their protecting pink sheaths as it had been before court dresses were spoken of. She felt bewildered. A visit to court seemed to her a thing as much out of the question as a visit to fairyland, for never before had she been with people who would have given a word or a thought to such a thing. Suddenly the carriage stopped at a dull house in a dull street. 'Now I must look my best!' thought Olive; 'this is the place.' But no one seemed to care how she looked, and the lady whom they were visiting was all but blind. Then they hurried home, for they were going out to dine.

Early next morning Olive was informed that a 'lady' had come from Madame Filoselle's to fit her with some stays.

'I don't want stays,' cried she; 'I have never worn them till lately. Mine are new.'

'Madame Filoselle won't make dresses for people who wear ill-fitting stays. Run away. She thinks all ill-fitting but her own. Let the

woman who tries them on say which you are to have. She knows better than you.'

Olive obeyed.

'I expect a parcel coming while I am here,' said the 'lady.' 'Madame Filoselle wishes you to select your underclothing from the parcel of things she is submitting to you. She wishes me to stay and give you any assistance in my power in helping you to make your choice.'

'Who is going to pay for all this?' was Olive's thought: but she did not like to give it utterance.

'Don't you think there is some mistake?' she said. 'I don't believe that mamma ordered anything but a dress.'

'No, mademoiselle, there is no mistake. Madame Filoselle told me to come to-day, and she said I was to be sure to see that you chose a becoming outfit.'

'Outfit? Where am I going?'

'Into the world, miss. Young ladies always want a complete set of new things when once they begin to go into society.'

Olive thought she was dreaming. Was she, who had never known any life but a quiet one,

who was familiar with nothing but the dull house in Harley Street and the hedgerows of Austerfield, to be suddenly transplanted and live in the full glitter of the sun?

A large parcel arrived. Two servants tottered under its weight as it came upstairs. Olive's garments had been rather plain. These were embroidered, and trimmed, and daintily finished. 'They can't be meant for me,' said she, full of wonder at their fineness and elaboration of ornament.

'Oh, yes; there is no mistake, I assure you,' said the 'lady'; and then she pulled out a notebook and pencil, and laid them on the table, ready to write down each article which was to be ordered. There were about half-a-dozen different specimens of each article of wearing apparel, and as Olive's choice was made, one dozen of each was inscribed in the 'lady's' book. Besides these, there were boxes of pocket-handkerchiefs of various degrees of fineness, stockings, gloves, sleeves, collars, and habit-shirts.

'It is absurd of me to go on ordering things!' cried Olive—'quite absurd! We are only wasting our time, for I am sure there is some

mistake.' And she rang the bell, and sent the maid who answered it, to bring Lady Brooke without delay.

'It is all right,' said that lady reassuringly. 'Your Aunt Selina was very kind and sweet to you, but she was not the best person to equip a young girl for her introduction to society, for she has no idea what is wanted. Don't look so frightened, Olive. You are not going to have such an overpowering number of new things, after all! Madame Filoselle is only going to send you a complete set of clothing. She and I have taken you in hand, and we are going to reform you from head to foot.'

'But such handsome, good things! I thought I was to be economical.'

Lady Brooke smiled. 'Let this person who is helping you have her way, dear. You are in good hands.'

The 'lady' was half amused, half impatient. She showed Lady Brooke what had been already ordered, and said, 'The rest of the things will come to-morrow.'

So they did. Next day came bonnets, hats, and flowers for the hair. 'I feel like an exhausted receiver!' cried Olive, who knew some-

thing of scientific expressions from her uncle, but was vague in her method of using them. A mantle and shawl followed, and last came, not the one willowy-green dress which Olive expected, but the white one also, trimmed with silk and lilies of the valley, and white butterflies for her hair; and the box was by no means empty when these two dresses were taken out, for beneath them were a pretty light blue cashmere, and another evening dress. In short, Olive now had everything she could possibly wear or wish to wear for some time to come. She went with her mother to Madame Filoselle, and that lady was justly enchanted with the transformation she had worked. Olive resigned herself to the possession of all these lovely things—she whose wardrobe had once been so circumscribed had now pretty dresses for all occasions, and bonnets or headgear of the lighter sort, and shoes, gloves, nay, even fans to match them. ‘Mother,’ said she one day, ‘you are far too generous to me. I could very well have worn some of my old things; they were quite good still. You don’t buy one quarter so many things for yourself as you do for me.’

‘Of course not!’ said Lady Brooke; ‘it would be very strange if I did.’

Olive looked inquiringly.

‘You silly child, don’t you understand what a pleasure it is to me to see you look pretty and hear you admired? When is the next Millennium soirée?’

‘Poor mamma! you did not enjoy that evening.’

‘I don’t know. I should like to go to another. Let us go and see your Aunt Selina, and ask her to take us with her. Put on one of your Pre-Raphaelite dresses, my dear. You may as well wear those things out in private life. We are not going anywhere else. It will conciliate her.’

Mrs. Brooke was in trouble. Her husband was very ill. He had been working too hard, and had had a strong warning that his brain would not stand such undue exertion. He was ordered abroad for a thorough rest and change, and was advised to go at once.

‘We are both going,’ said Mrs. Brooke. ‘I am glad now that Olive is with you, for we could not very well have taken her, and I should not have known where to leave her.’

He is really very ill, Honora. I am very anxious.'

'You must be. So am I—most anxious. Selina, could you give us tickets for the next soirée at the Millennium?'

Mrs. Brooke did not notice her scanty sympathy; did not wonder at her asking for an invitation to a place where she hated to go; never dreamed that she wanted to see Sir John Ellerton again in order to ask him to visit her in Kensington Square. Mrs. Brooke was not suspicious, and her thoughts were full of her husband. 'We go in three days,' said she. 'I feel miserable about Richard.'

'Don't be miserable about Richard; he only wants rest.'

'Olive,' said Mrs. Brooke, 'you could do me a good turn. I have sent out invitations for a large party on the twentieth of next month. Will you write in my name and explain why it must be put off? Here is a list of the people I asked.'

'Are the addresses there?' inquired Olive, who knew her aunt's ways.

But for once Mrs. Brooke had been methodical. She had made up a bundle of letters of

acceptance, and of course each bore its writer's address. She put these in Olive's hand, and the one at the top began, 'Mr. W. K. Morrison has much pleasure in accepting——'

Olive stared at it in silence. Her heart was touched by the sight. During all these days of opening parcels of pretty things from the milliner, she had never had time to think of Willie. She had not had many frocks when she knew him, and those she wore then cost little thought or money. 'Tell me about *him*,' said she, pointing to the note. 'Who is he?'

'A man who paints the most lovely pictures. Mr. Denbigh begged for an invitation for him. Honora, you had better let Mr. Denbigh bring him to see you. They say he is so clever!'

'I am glad to hear it, dear; but I don't think I want to see him. I do not mean to have acquaintances of that kind. I can't. There is a Mr. Willoughby who knows Olive and will ask her to dance, but I have had to give him a hint not to do it. I am sorry if I have offended him, I am sure.'

-

‘My dear, he is offended—frightfully offended! He spoke to me about it. He was engaged to dance with Olive he said, and when he claimed her promise, she told him that he had made a mistake, and danced with some one else. I thought at the time it must have been your doing.’

‘Of course it was! Why should she dance with Mr. Willoughby? It is not worth while for us to sit up till three or four in the morning for the sake of men of that kind.’

Mrs. Brooke glanced at Olive in some uneasiness. Olive was not attending to what was passing, but vaguely fingering the note she still held in her hand. She knew it was not from her Willie, but still it possessed an odd attraction for her. She wished the party could have taken place. She would have liked to see this Mr. W. K. Morrison. He was, at any rate, almost a namesake.

When Lady Brooke met Sir John Ellerton at the Millennium, she quite forgot that she did not want many visitors in Kensington Square. The door of the house was flung open before him, and he was made to feel that he would be

welcome at any time. He did come frequently, and Lady Brooke bought a copy of 'Our Acreocracy,' in which it stood revealed that estates in Yorkshire, Cumberland, and Scotland produced for him an income of 17,000*l.* a-year. 'That book is very sordid reading,' said she to Olive when she had mastered her subject. 'I'll take it away. Put some poetry or something of that kind on the table.'

But now all Lady Brooke's mind was given to Olive's first drawing-room. She took her to a professional lady, who tied a voluminous table-cloth round her waist and gathered it up train-wise to show her pupils how to manage such appendages when the time came. She had solemn interviews with Madame Filoselle and others. All said Olive would look sweet on the occasion, and all were triumphantly right. She did look especially pretty.

Lady Brooke had not been to court for years, and was comparatively a stranger in English society; but Mrs. Raymond was not, and Mrs. Raymond seemed bent on introducing her to everyone worth knowing. Olive, accustomed to Mrs. Brooke's literary folks, and to

them only, suddenly found herself in a new world. She was rather oppressed by it; she wondered how Mrs. Raymond could look so happy. Mrs. Raymond was happy, and thoroughly at home. Now and then Olive heard fragments of conversation which proved this. Once or twice she heard herself named, always in the most flattering terms. That, she supposed, was due to politeness. All were courtiers and courtly here. An old lady, evidently an intimate friend of Mrs. Raymond's, was speaking to her now. Olive could not avoid hearing what she said. 'I did not know your niece was so old. How fast time does go! Poor thing! How pretty she is! What a sad thing for her!'

'Hush!' said Mrs. Raymond softly. 'She knows nothing about it. We think it better to keep it from her.'

'Much better. You are quite right. It would only be giving her useless pain. She is a charming girl, to be sure. I am so sorry for her, but I hope she will marry soon—that would be the best thing that could happen.'

‘Much the best. I hope and trust she will.’

After this people came and went. High-born ladies said a few gracious words to Olive, but she was weary with waiting so long in the ante-room, and could not forget what she had heard, or cease to wonder at it. Why was she so to be pitied? Because her father was so far away from her in India—because her uncle was so ill—that must be the reason, and he was going to die. No greater grief could befall her than that.

The first thing she said, when, exhausted by this unaccustomed scene, she huddled herself into the Raymonds’ carriage with her mother and aunt, was, ‘Please tell me something—I am miserable until I know. Is Uncle Richard going to die? Is he so ill that he can’t recover?’

‘Of course not, you silly child! What can have put that into your head?’

‘I am so unhappy about him—so afraid that you are only saying that to comfort me.’

‘His complete recovery is certain, if he will consent to take a proper amount of rest. How

can you doubt it? What has put such a fancy into your mind? You had no such fear this morning.'

'Something I heard——'

'You are foolish; you have made some mistake. Don't be silly, Olive; you are going to be a great success, I can see that.'

'Am I?' said Olive, perfectly uninterested. 'I feel very strange and unhappy. Do tell me why people pity me, and call me "poor thing," and what unhappy or unfortunate thing is being kept from me; I know there is something, and you must tell me,' and she turned imploringly to Mrs. Raymond, 'for I heard you talking about it to the lady in light-grey velvet and pearls.'

Lady Brooke and Mrs. Raymond looked on each other with eyes full of meaning. The latter said promptly, 'Olive, you are dreaming. I have never said a word about you all the morning, except to thank any of my friends who came to tell me that you were a pretty girl. If I had known that you were going to talk in this foolish way as soon as we got into the carriage, I should have said. "Yes, she is

pretty, but, poor child, you have no idea how stupid she is.”’

Olive smiled faintly ; she was only partly convinced. ‘Are you quite sure that the grey-velvet lady was not talking of me?’

‘I am certain. Have I not told you so?’

‘But she was looking at me.’

‘Yes she said once or twice, “Your niece is so pretty, I can’t take my eyes off her”—that’s why she looked, I suppose—the worst is, she is half blind.’

‘But she said niece——’

‘Now, Olive, be reasonable. You are not my only niece. I can’t tell you the name of the girl we were talking of—that would not be right, but I see that nothing short of that will convince you.’

Olive felt ashamed of herself and was silent.

‘What a blessing it is to know that Mrs. Ullathorne is out of England!’ observed Mrs. Raymond. ‘Do you know, I feel as if an oppressive weight were removed now that she is gone. She got to know of all our doings, and never ap-

proved of any of them, and we were forced to listen to her wonderful speeches and never resent them. Tiresome woman ! I wonder how often she would see us if she were poor, or how much range we should grant her tongue if she lost all her money ? Here we are at Falkland Houses ! Don't you think our house rather nice ? but it's only a hired one—we are not so well off as you. By-the-by, are you pretty comfortable at Sister Ullathorne's ? She bullies everyone but her servants, and spoils them until they are unbearable. And then every now and then she breaks out, insults them all, and they leave in a body. I suppose, if they were ever so disagreeable, you would not dare to turn them away ?'

'Of course not. That is my tenure of office ; but I am perfectly comfortable.'

'They used to make a fuss when Sister Ullathorne had a few friends to dinner—they said it gave them trouble.'

'Sister Ullathorne only asks plain men and women,' said Lady Brooke, laughing. 'That is so silly of her. Servants will run themselves off their legs for anyone with a title—they

enjoy it. I know quite well how to manage them.'

'And everyone else too,' thought Mrs. Raymond, who, though she was forming a very strong alliance with her Indian sister-in-law, was quite aware of her powers. 'Good-bye. I am very tired! You are coming to us this evening, Honora?—be punctual.'

'Sir John Ellerton is going to dine with us,' replied Lady Brooke, 'and Mrs. Ptolomais; she won't stay late, though, and I suppose I may bring him with me?'

'Of course you may,' said Mrs. Raymond with a meaning glance at Olive, who was looking out of the window.

'Good-bye, then; thank you for taking us to-day. By-the-by, I shall not be so afraid of moving about next week—I am going to have the use of Dr. Brooke's carriage while he is away. Selina asked him to let me have it. It looks rather professional, but I don't mind that—it will be an immense comfort to me. *Au revoir.*'

'It is simply astounding,' said Mrs. Raymond to her husband. 'That woman's genius

is prodigious ! She has not been in London a month, and yet she has contrived to find people willing to supply her with everything she can want or wish for. She has a better house than we have, and it does not cost her a penny ; and now she has a carriage, and very soon——’

‘ You could have had the carriage yourself if you had asked for it. I wish you had. It would have done for me, and you could have had ours all to yourself.’

‘ But it would never have occurred to me to ask for it. That thinking of things so promptly is just what is so very clever in Honora.’

When Lady Brooke entered her drawing-room it was full of lovely flowers. She had ‘ chanced ’ to say in Sir John Ellerton’s hearing how wretched it was to her to live in rooms without flowers, and he had felt it to be a privilege to send her some.

CHAPTER XII.

I cannot but remember such things were,
That were most precious to me.—*Macbeth*.

Queen.

What would she have?

Her. She speaks much of her father.—*Hamlet*.

MRS. ULLATHORNE'S drawing-room was certainly a very agreeable room at any time, and doubly so now that she herself was not occupying it. The sun shone pleasantly through the three large south windows which looked on the square, and the back drawing-room was made cheerful by a glimpse of the tops of some fine old sycamore trees which grew with quite majestic dignity in the long strip of garden at the back of the house. The spring had been wet and cold, so no one had the heart to shut out a single ray of sunshine, or fragment of clear sky. Olive was sitting in a low chair by the window reading her Aunt Selina's last new novel. All for love of her Olive was reading

it; for, though it had just come out, she had read it, and copied it, and heard it read aloud, until she could almost have repeated the whole three volumes by heart. Olive's dress was very pretty, and made of some faint white Indian stuff trimmed with old gold satin. The sun flickered on this and illumined soft warm patches, and filled every fold with reflected light, and caught the tawny satin and made it burn with a new richness, or rested on Olive herself, lending depth to the splendour of her dark eyes, and heightening the delicacy of her wonderfully delicate complexion. She was rather sad. She had, as it would seem, everything the world could give her, but she felt suddenly cut off from the companionship of all who loved her. They were few in number, certainly; but Dr. Brooke had always been as loving to her as a father, and Mrs. Brooke, in spite of her absurdities, was a very kind-hearted good woman, and intensely fond of Olive whenever she had time to think of her. Now, though she was with her own mother, she did not feel half so much at home as she had done with her uncle and aunt. Lady

Brooke was polite, always kindly ready to take an interest in anything which concerned Olive, but she never went beyond this— never showed more affection than she might have felt for a pleasant visitor. In point of fact, Olive felt very much like a visitor, and had difficulty in believing that she was the daughter of the pretty lady who was now her daily companion. She constantly found herself imagining a time when this unreal existence—this life of dressing and gaiety—would come to an end, and she would be at home again with her dear uncle and aunt, and would look on this visit to Lady Brooke as a dream. So far as it went, it was a very pleasant dream. They had spent nearly two months in perpetually dressing for different kinds of entertainments. Gay luncheons had been swiftly followed by garden parties or afternoon concerts; dinner parties had been squeezed in between balls and soirées; operas, theatres, and lawn-tennis parties had been enjoyed whenever a spare hour or so could be found for them. How much of their lives during the last eight weeks had been spent on the great main roads, hurrying home from one scene of plea-

sure with barely time to dress for another ! Olive had thoroughly enjoyed the excitement of this perpetual change, but she painfully felt the need of some one who loved her. In Harley Street her uncle's eyes always brightened when he saw her ; and she never entered the study without a kind word from her aunt, though it might be little more than—' Oh, it is you, darling ; do sit down, but don't speak until I give you leave.' Now, though Olive did not go so far as to make the actual comparison, Lady Brooke treated her much as a milliner treats a lay figure. She was careful to see that her daughter was well dressed and well placed, and then, so long as they happened to be alone together, she took very little further notice of her. When visitors came, Lady Brooke always placed her in the best possible light ; but Olive pined for a word or two of kindness when no one was there. The words ' dear ' and ' darling ' fell trippingly enough from Lady Brooke's tongue, but they had no inner warmth—they were only used conventionally. Moreover, Olive felt as if Lady Brooke either placed a barrier between herself and her father and

brothers and sisters, or did not care to remove one which by some accident already existed. She continually spoke of Sir Chesterfield, but never as if Olive would have much to do with him ; nor did she ever seem to look forward to the time when Olive and her brothers and sisters would all live together, or do anything to draw them nearer to each other now. Lady Brooke wrote long letters to India to her husband, and to Lausanne to the girls, but she never showed Olive their answers, or asked her to write to them, or gave her a message from them, or tried in any way to make her feel as if she were anything to them. Olive often thought of these things with surprise and pain. She dropped her book now to think of them once more. Lady Brooke was writing, and if Olive could have seen her letter she might have read :—‘ Do not be unhappy about Olive. I always told you that it was foolish to be so, and now that she is with me I say so still more strongly. She has every chance of doing extremely well. She has every possible advantage. Thanks to our own friends and to your sister Esther’s kind introductions, we have had

ample opportunity of enjoying society. Olive is remarkably beautiful ; a little dreamy and not a little romantic, but I think that is easily to be accounted for by the odd way in which she has been brought up. Sir John Ellerton is very much in love with her. She is not aware of it yet, and I do not intend to enlighten her ; indeed, I did not attach much importance to the matter myself until three weeks ago, when he brought his mother to call on us. She is a dear old lady, as good and kind as can be, but much too full of the importance of her family and of her son to come here and sanction any love-affair with poor dear Olive, if she had not seen that he was so thoroughly in earnest that it would be impossible to make him take the disadvantages of such an alliance into account. He will be a very good husband for her, for he has at least 20,000*l.* a year. They will probably be married some time in the autumn or winter. I shall leave Amabel with them in England, for I am sure India will never suit her, and return to you with the younger girls ; and then I think we may all be very happy together if you will only take brighter views of

everything. Anyhow, if Olive gets such an extremely desirable husband as Sir John Ellerton, I do not see that you need worry yourself any longer on her account; indeed, it will be wrong to me and to your other children if you do.' So far had Lady Brooke written, when a loud postman's knock announced the arrival of more letters. She grumbled. Olive rejoiced: she said that she liked letters, and often wished that the postman would come twice as often. 'You would not get more letters if he did,' replied Lady Brooke, but such considerations were too deep for Olive; besides, she was soon absorbed in a letter from her Aunt Selina. Lady Brooke had a packet of letters. Some were invitations, and these she at once answered, and thus some time was spent. 'There, that is from your Aunt Ullathorne,' said she at length; and as she spoke, she tossed aside a letter with an enormous garden-seat-like monogram as vulgar as modern taste could devise. 'I have read it, though I knew there would be something in it to vex me.'

It was rather a comical letter. Since Mrs Ullathorne's departure she had had leisure to

think, and had 'come to the conclusion that it was very foolish to shrink from saying unpleasant things to servants when benefit to yourself might accrue from doing so.' Her letter was full of orders to her sister Honora to be very severe with those whom she was looking after. She was to take the housemaid (lazy thing) to task for this, and the cook for that, and to get about twenty times as much work out of the under-servants as they had ever done before. In fact, Lady Brooke had no difficulty in seeing that Mrs. Ullathorne was trying to get her to set everything a-going in the house which for years she herself had pined to have done but dared not order.

'What will you do?' cried Olive. 'I am sure they won't like it.'

'Nothing,' said Lady Brooke calmly. 'The servants are very good creatures, and if your aunt wishes to make these changes she must speak to them herself. Your Aunt Ullathorne is in Italy.'

'How delightful! Is she not very happy?'

'She says that she has only gone there because her doctor wished her to stay at Kreuz-

nach. I'll read you what she says : "The thing which has struck me most in Italy is the hardness of the water."'

Olive's lip curled.

'Yes, money is oddly distributed,' remarked Lady Brooke. 'Your Aunt Ullathorne, who would have been completely in her element as matron of a workhouse, ruling her paupers with a rod of iron, is able to have every delight money can procure for her, and finds nothing to astonish her in Italy but the hardness of the water, and has thought of nothing on her way there but how clever it will be to make me do a bit of grinding down her domestics which she dares not do herself; and here am I, who could so enjoy wealth, obliged to think twice before I spend sixpence! However, I won't complain, for I am very comfortable.'

Lady Brooke had a perfect talent for making herself comfortable. She never seemed to exert herself much to secure this happy state, or in any way to oppress those who waited on her, but wherever she went she always, in an incredibly short space of time, gathered around her everything that was at all necessary to her

enjoyment. She instinctively knew the warmest corner and easiest chair, and in this she basked gracefully, looking rosy, comely, caressing, and entirely happy. She did not let Mrs. Ullathorne's letter distress her—nothing ever did distress her much but lack of money. Presently she looked up and said, 'Olive, remember this: one of the most important things in this world is to secure a good income; then if you are unhappy, it must be your own fault. If you have not enough money, you will be worried every hour of your life.'

Olive hated talk about money. She lost no time in making an excuse to go into the dining-room to fetch something. It was empty; so she sat down in a chair by the window, and drew aside the white curtain. Not for the sake of looking out, however, for her thoughts were very busy with other things, and she was anxiously wondering if her uncle would ever be well again. She might have been there half an hour, when her eyes rested on a figure which had already passed the window more than once. It was a lady. She was not by any means young, but very handsome, with a beauty of

feature which time has no power to alter. She was, however, so pale and haggard and anxious-looking, that Olive felt a throb of pain even at the first glimpse of her. She was plainly, almost humbly dressed, and wore an old black shawl folded tightly round her ; nevertheless, she was unmistakably a lady. Her manner was so strange that Olive could not help watching her. She passed backwards and forwards before the window, each time shortening the range of her little walk, and each time fixing a very earnest, not to say painfully eager, gaze on Olive's face, who in turn felt so peculiarly attracted by this poor woman that she never removed her eyes from her for a moment. Even when the lady disappeared, Olive, who in her eagerness had risen to her feet, still stood where she was, so certain did it seem that this stranger would return. She did return ; looked most searchingly as before, again passed on ; but this time, after walking perhaps two steps, she turned back impetuously, came to the railing immediately in front of the window where Olive was standing, grasped it as if to support herself, and then stood still. Her lips were

parted as if to speak; but she faltered, and just as Olive and she were thus standing with eyes riveted on each other's faces, Lady Brooke came in and said, 'Olive dear, I quite forgot to remind you—— Oh, what is the matter?' cried she, for she saw Olive's startled face. She came to the window; she saw the strange lady. The stranger saw her, and now her gaze was transferred to Lady Brooke, but its character changed, and a look of intense horror came over her wan face. Olive saw this, and saw, too, how pale her mother had grown, and how she trembled.

'What is it?' cried Olive; 'who is she? She has been outside such a long time.' But Lady Brooke did not speak, and still stood at the window. Suddenly a slim, graceful figure glided swiftly forward, and a lady in whom Olive at once thought she recognized the pretty lady of her youth whose name was Alice, put her hand on the strange lady's shoulder. She turned to look at the new-comer, and at that moment Olive saw that, though the one face was serene and peaceful, and the other worn by grief and pain, the features of both were almost identical, and there could be no doubt that the

two ladies were sisters. The new-comer said two or three kind words to her sister, took her by the arm, and then gently but firmly led her away. Both cast one look back at the window where Olive and her mother were standing, and both looked at Olive and not at Lady Brooke, and the look, though full of distress, was kind. Slowly they disappeared. Olive felt shaken in every nerve. She turned to Lady Brooke, hoping for some explanation.

‘What a shock it does give one to see mad people!’ ejaculated that lady, with a long sigh of relief, when they were gone. ‘Olive, we have no time to lose: have you forgotten that we have to be at Mrs. Bertie Warrington’s at two?’

‘But, mother,’ said Olive, ‘don’t you know anything about that lady? She looked just as if she knew us. I thought she was going to speak to me.’

‘Perhaps she was. Keep away from her if she comes again, for it is very dangerous when mad people take it into their heads to mix you up with their fancies!’

‘But, mother, do you know nothing of her?’
—I——’

‘Why do you ask if I know her? How can I know her?’

‘She looked——’

‘She looked uncommonly like Bedlam, and the woman who took her away was not much better. Don’t waste more time on them,’ said Lady Brooke imperatively, for Olive was just going to say that she almost thought the second lady was an old friend of Dr. Brooke’s; but Lady Brooke would not listen to her. ‘We are to dine a little earlier this evening, and go to the opera with old Lady Ellerton. I have just had a note from her. Let us think of your dress for this bazaar—it is a much pleasanter subject than mad women.’

CHAPTER XIII.

Pleasures newly found are sweet.—WORDSWORTH.

‘OLIVE, what are you doing, dear?’ inquired Lady Brooke.

‘Writing to Aunt Selina.’

‘Don’t waste your time; she will never read your letter.’

Olive smiled and said, ‘Oh yes, she will; I know how to avoid all danger of her overlooking it—I never leave a blank half sheet. People who do that when they write to Aunt Selina often have a bit of a chapter written on the back of their letters, and then she tears it off and that fragment is lost sight of.’

‘She is a foolish woman,’ muttered Lady Brooke unguardedly.

‘Mother!’ cried Olive. ‘I love Aunt Selina dearly! She is very kind, and awfully clever!’

Lady Brooke shrugged her shoulders. ‘She

is always sowing laurel-seed, but does any of it ever come up?'

'Do you not like her novels?'

'I like them immensely, but she says she makes no money by them.'

'You spoke of laurels—laurels do not imply money.'

'Oh! laurels that are genuine are always gilded. But never mind that now; don't think that I do not love your Aunt Selina because I take practical views of things. I am practical; I never do anything unless I hope to benefit by doing it.'

Lady Brooke was practical, and had a wonderful gift of turning everything that happened, no matter how unsusceptible of such treatment it might at first sight appear to be, into a means of obtaining some advantage for herself. She had even found a way to profit by Mrs. Ullathorne's last letter, though at first she had resolved to take no notice of it. She soon bethought herself, however, and wrote to tell that lady that having, as in duty bound, conveyed her wishes to her household, she was sorry to say that her words had been very ill

received. The servants had been quite good and settled before, but the moment she made little complaints, and tried to exact a little more work from them, it had seemed to revive ill feeling, and one and all they had said that it was scarcely worth while to begin to make any change in their work for the short time they had to stay. Under the circumstances, she advised Mrs. Ullathorne not to return until this fresh outbreak had blown over. Mrs. Ullathorne at once wrote back to thank her kind sister for the hint, and said that she had determined not to return until after Christmas. She hoped her sister would be able to keep house for her a little longer. She knew that she could not remain in London during the hot months of the year, but did not mind the servants being left then, if Honora would return to London in the autumn.

‘Do you think we shall leave town, mother?’ said Olive, when she heard this.

‘Not unless we get some nice invitation, I fear, for your father’s last cheque was not a very large one. I am longing for some fresh air, but I don’t know how to get it.’

‘ We could go and spend a few weeks with Aunt Lettice at Austerfield ; that would cost nothing, and be delightful.’

‘ I have often heard you speak of the delights of Austerfield,’ said Lady Brooke drily. ‘ I believe they consisted in wandering over pasture fields and picking bunches of wild flowers. Do you think you would like a month or two of that kind of life now ?’

Olive was silent.

‘ It is pleasant enough to gather big bunches of buttercups when you are a baby, but one outgrows even that.’

Olive sighed. She began to wonder if, amid all the fascinations of a London season as she now knew it, she had lost the capacity of enjoying simple country pleasures. She did not think so—the thought of her happy early life at Austerfield had always power to touch her most profoundly. The very name of the place now sent her thoughts careering back to the days of her youth. She saw herself roaming carelessly over flowery fields, light-hearted and free as air. She had never been half so happy since she left them, and if it were true that she had

outgrown all power of taking pleasure in that innocent and joyous existence, she could not possibly be the gainer by any experience which had taught her to despise it.

Lady Brooke was quick to guess her thoughts, and said, 'It is all very well to sit here trying to make yourself believe that you would like to run wild again as you used to do; but, my dear, if I were to pack up a box of plain old dresses for you and send you away to Aunt Lettice, and tell you that you should never return to London, I do not think anything you found at Austerfield would in any way compensate for what you leave behind you here. Depend upon it, you would find it very dull, and would heartily wish yourself back again.'

Olive made no answer. Perhaps Lady Brooke was right. It was certainly very delightful to live as she did now, enjoying every luxury a great capital can offer, but she was not going to live in this way for ever. 'Is it gay in India?' she asked, for she often wondered about India, and why her mother never talked of it to her.

‘Oh yes, it is gay—it depends, of course, on where you happen to be.’

‘Where shall we be? Is papa always in the same place?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Lady Brooke, absently. ‘I don’t suppose that you will have to go out to India. It is not at all likely—at least, I hope not.’

Why did Lady Brooke hope not? Did she not want her there?

‘Don’t look puzzled, Olive; I can’t tell you all my fancies, but my idea is that your life here will be so happy that you will not want to go there. But, Olive, child, see! here is your Aunt Raymond, and you are not ready! You ought to have gone to dress an hour ago.’

A life of continual gaiety leaves no time for unravelling puzzles or indulging in disagreeable reflections. Olive had only a few minutes to dress for a bazaar, and an important bazaar too. Mrs. Bertie Warrington, the unrivalled beauty of two seasons ‘last past,’ had been invited to preside at a stall at one of these gatherings in aid of some popular charity or other, and had hit upon an admirable expedient to make

her stall a marked success, and at the same time to prove that she was still, and for many seasons would be, the beauty *par excellence*. She had courageously picked out ten of the very prettiest girls of that season to help her. They were all to be dressed alike; and Mrs. Warrington had devised a Warrington livery, as she called it, in which she and her ten assistants were to appear. They were to wear dresses of the most exquisitely delicate sea-green Japanese crape with buttons of tiny Indian shells. Their hats were to be of the same material, and it is needless to say that hats of this colour were not so becoming to all the fair ladies concerned as they might be to Mrs. Bertie Warrington.

‘Olive will be here, dear Esther, in one moment; we have been talking, and have forgotten time.’

‘How is the great event going on?’ asked Mrs. Raymond.

‘Admirably! I am in great spirits about it. Sir John is a dear fellow.’ Olive was to go with Mrs. Raymond, but Lady Brooke said she would look in at the bazaar on her way

home from some afternoon visits, and bring her back with her. Just as they were about to leave the house, in came Sir John Ellerton, with a lovely bouquet of yellow roses. 'They came from Hillborough,' said he; 'I sent expressly for yellow roses, as you said the Warrington costume was to be green and gold.'

'Green—not green and gold,' replied Mrs. Raymond. 'The dear lady fancied that no one would look well in that colour but herself. However, I venture to think——' Here she paused with a triumphant glance at Olive, whose complexion was dazzling, whose eyes flashed with brilliance, and whose dress suited her to perfection.

Olive was following Mrs. Raymond out of the room, when Sir John said rather pathetically, 'But my roses, Miss Brooke; I got them on purpose for you; I hoped you would wear some of them to-day at the bazaar.'

'Will you take them as a bouquet, Olive, or put some of them in your hat?' asked Lady Brooke, in a voice which admitted of no denial.

'Not as a bouquet, for I must keep my

hands free ; I am a work-woman to-day.' Olive took off her hat and put a few rosebuds in it, and could not but own gratefully that it looked twice as well for the addition. Then Mrs. Raymond carried her off. They were behind time, and not another moment could be spared even to Sir John.

The bazaar was held in one of the fine old gardens which were once common in Kensington, but which are now becoming less numerous every year. Large indeed was the premium, it was whispered, and cruelly brief the lease, which with a mighty rent gave possession of this more than commonly beautiful one. There were grand elm, chestnut, and poplar trees in it, thickets of fragrant flowering shrubs ; there was a spacious lawn with borders of old-fashioned flowers, shady walks, and a very pretty fountain ; and there was no sign of town, unless it were that, to an epicure in colour sensations, the sky at its purest had not quite the clearness which it had in the country. No intrusive chimney-pot suggested neighbours, and if news from the humming city came there at all, it was only in one grand wave-like murmur

in which all sounds of common life, even down to the well-nigh invincible drone of the street organ, were melted together. It was really hard to believe that there were streets, and omnibuses, and squares, and shops—nay, dens of want and wickedness—within five minutes' walk. To-day, this favoured spot was at its brightest; white tents were disposed at regular intervals on the lawn, seats with Persian carpets and Stothard-like figures enjoying them were scattered over it—for though the gentlemen's costume might not have been entirely to that great artist's mind, that of the ladies would probably not have been displeasing to him. A band was playing, and a gay crowd moving to and fro, with brilliant contrasts at every turn between delicate-tinted dresses and deep green leaves. The tents were for the buyers and sellers. Mrs. Bertie Warrington's stall was in one of the large ones; she had been offered a small one for herself and party, but she preferred to see and be seen. She and some of her subordinate beauties were already there, and putting last touches to some deft bits of arrangement as Olive entered. The flags,

flowers, bright wares and gay dresses of the sellers almost dazzled her. Mrs. Bertie Warrington darted a glance of displeasure at Olive's rosebuds. They were not in the bond. She herself had none, and she saw that she had thus missed a grace which might have added to her. She was arranging about twenty varieties of photographs of herself in semi-concealed packets ready for the crowd which would madly rush to buy them. The ten beauties who had come to help her saw this, and thought her a 'vain thing,' and all found themselves secretly hoping that not a single soul would wish for one portrait. They, being lesser lights, and not having attained to the honour of figuring in shop windows between bishops and actresses or any of the savages with whom our country may happen to be fighting, had no claim to imagine that their photographs might be required of them, and could bring none. Not that these thoughts passed through Olive's mind: she was too new to the whole thing for that, and did not even know that she was there as a beauty. She thought ready wits and an active pair of hands would be all that could be

demanding of her. The stall was a perfect jumble of Chinese and Japanese things, Turkish embroideries, crewel work, cabinets, cushions, baskets from barbarous countries, and all the numberless articles for which money can be obtained. People might laugh at Mrs. Bertie Warrington and her inferior planets, but her idea proved itself to be a good one, and her stall was beset with a crowd which never diminished. It was a crowd composed of lordly materials, and loudly beat Mrs. Warrington's heart when the band struck up 'God save the Queen.' She was not disappointed. Her stall was the first which was visited by royalty, and just as she was selling a paper-knife to the Prince of Wales, on which her own fair fingers had engraved some lovely flowering grasses, a gentleman said to Olive, 'I have got Mrs. Warrington's photograph, and I hope you will allow me to have yours also.'

'Mine!' she exclaimed, blushing deeply.

'Yes, please. The day will be very inadequately recalled to me by the portrait I have got. I must have yours too.'

'Oh no,' said Olive; but a hand was laid on

her arm. It was that of Mrs. Raymond, who happened to be near and had heard.

‘Of course you must let Mr. Ardrossan have your photograph, dear. That is a thing which is constantly done at bazaars.’

‘But I have none here.’

‘I’ll send for a packet; I know you have a quantity at home—they will be here in half an hour.’

Mrs. Raymond despatched a messenger with a note to Lady Brooke’s maid.

‘Then, I’ll return in half an hour,’ Mr. Ardrossan had said, but he had not left the corner where he was standing. It was really very amusing to watch the ways of the place. Mrs. Bertie Warrington sold photographs of herself for any price obtainable, from ten shillings to five guineas, and chattered away regardless of sense to all comers, merrily laughing as she huddled up crisp bank-notes or dropped chinking coins into a tall narrow china jar which had been hopelessly cracked on its way to the scene of action, and which she had forthwith converted into her till. It had the good property of being so narrow-necked that

she could not put her hand into it to produce change ; she gave none, therefore ; and all her green maidens were as busy and nearly as extortionate as herself. So rapid was the disappearance of the wares, that the stall constantly needed re-arrangement. When Olive's photographs came, Mrs. Bertie Warrington's cup of happiness was somewhat dashed, for she saw Mr. Ardrossan give her a five-pound note in exchange for one, and that was as much as she had ever received for her own ; but one photograph well sold will not make a reigning beauty, nor yet having to write your name on the back of it, as Olive was doing now.

'There, Olive, is the whole packet for you,' said Mrs. Raymond, giving her the spoil of the Kensington Square photograph-drawer. 'Sell as many of them as you can ; but you can't expect many people to give as much as Mr. Ardrossan—he is a millionaire, you see.'

'No one else will want one,' said Olive much ashamed, and she thrust the packet into a corner out of sight. But she was wrong. Mr. Willoughby, who had seen this transaction from afar, came and urgently begged for one, and

Mr. Ambergreen and others did the same. 'Well, I suppose it is a good thing for the charity,' thought Olive, as she dropped guinea after guinea into Mrs. Bertie Warrington's all-absorbing till; but when buyers appeared and asked for the roses in her hat, to wear as 'button-holes,' she was reduced to fly to her chief for advice. 'Want to buy your roses?' said that lady, who was in a great hurry, as well as rather cross at Olive's success: 'well, sell them. We come here to sell things, you know; besides, if you get rid of them, it will make you like the rest of the party, which you are not now.'

Then Olive saw that her poor roses had been an eyesore to her chief, so she hesitated no more about parting with them. She took off her hat quickly, unfastened them, and sold them one by one, to some gentlemen who were waiting for her decision. Her skill in extracting golden coins made her apply herself with double energy to the work of temptation. She was amused to see how easily bystanders could be lured into becoming the owners of articles which they would probably throw away ten minutes afterwards, all for the sake of a few

pleasant words and a bright smile. She gave them pleasant words and bright smiles. Mrs. Bertie Warrington saw, but had no time to be angry; she had a great ambition, which was—to sell off the entire contents of her stall, and then volunteer to help some less fortunate lady; and thus have the delight of hearing that two stalls owed their clearance to the beautiful Mrs. Warrington and her fair band of assistants.

Sir John Ellerton was in the tent. He had seen Olive sell the roses, but, much as he wished to approach her, the crowd was so great that for some time he could not. He felt bitterly mortified with what he had seen, and he did not like the spectacle before him. Here was this timid Olive taking a delight in making vacillating buyers cumber themselves with things which they would fain leave alone, and effecting sales with a rapidity which would have insured her a high salary at a West-end house. At last he squeezed his way nearer to her. As soon as she had a spare moment to bestow on him, she offered him an anti-macassar of a would-be Japanese design. The sun in its

splendour was looking urbanely askance at a feeble little marigold which lurked in a distant corner. He took it in his hand, and was rather appeased by it. 'It is a bit of her own work,' thought he, 'and she is giving me the opportunity of buying it.' He instantly pulled out his purse. 'It is your work, Miss Brooke?' said he.

'Oh no, not mine,' was her answer. 'I sold the little there was of mine an hour ago.'

'Of course!' said he, much aggrieved, 'of course you did; and you sold all the roses I brought you also! You need not have done that.'

'But I made five pounds by them,' cried Olive. 'I did not want to part with the roses, but I could not refuse such a large sum of money as that.'

'I would rather have given you twenty than have you sell them. You made five pounds, and now five fools are walking about the garden outside there with yellow roses in their button-holes, and telling people that they were in your bonnet a quarter of an hour ago! Besides, I gave them to you,' said he ruefully.

‘I have ever so many more at home,’ said Olive kindly, but in haste to be done with this; ‘I won’t sell them. Sir John, you must not make me talk now; I must mind my work; people want to buy things!’ ‘It is five guineas,’ said she to a lady with a bit of Turkish embroidery in her hand. ‘Thank you,’ she added, as the misguided person placed the sum in her hand, and then she wondered how it was that she so much enjoyed the chink of money that was not going to be hers.

‘You will not even let me buy a piece of work which is not your doing,’ exclaimed Sir John in an angry voice, and he threw the anti-macassar down and left her. Olive was too busy to be able to spend any time in thinking how ill-tempered Sir John was. All her companions were equally busy; all, with bright eyes and flushed cheeks, were making haste to do their task well. Mrs. Bertie Warrington herself was the busiest of all. Her stock of photographs was diminished, her stall shorn of much of its splendour. Many of the buyers had taken their purchases away with them, and most of the things left, displayed large white

tickets with the names of their new owners. It was growing late in the afternoon, and there would be no time to have the honour of clearing another stall, but, perhaps, enough for a hurried inspection of the other tents and a brief enjoyment of the want of success of their occupants. No one had sold so much as she had. Her triumph was complete—complete in every way; for though some of the girls who had helped her had been very much admired, that was no more than she intended, and she was still without a rival. She huddled away the two or three things which refused to quit her possession, and then said, ‘Ladies, I thank you cordially for the great help you have given me; I fancy that, when the sums gained are added up, it will be found that we have done splendidly! Let us count for ourselves.’ First she spread out a Turkish table-cover, and then she cried for help to break the jar which held her gains. A brisk blow with a walking-stick reduced it to fragments, and the work of counting began. It was a goodly sum, and Mrs. Bertie Warrington’s heart swelled with joy, and she and each weary beauty in her

train felt, as she threw herself back in her carriage to go home, that this had been a day of unalloyed triumph.

CHAPTER XIV.

Hear my soul speak.
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service.—*Tempest.*

MRS. RAYMOND was taking Olive home from the bazaar, when she suddenly remembered that Lady Brooke had promised to call for her. 'Never mind,' said she; 'we are now almost at Kensington Square; some one will tell her that you left with me. Get a little rest if you can. How tired you will be for the Academy Soirée!'

Olive was not exactly tired; the excitement of the day still supported her. Lady Brooke had not returned. Olive ran upstairs to dress for the evening. After a while a servant came to tell her that Sir John Ellerton was in the drawing-room. She did not feel as if she wanted to see him, but, as her mother had not returned, was obliged to go to him as soon as

possible. He was standing at one of the front windows looking at the convent opposite, and thinking it a much better place for young and pretty girls than that which he had just quitted, when Olive, beauteous in pale yellow silk, entered the room.

‘I have missed my mother,’ said she; ‘I ought to have waited for her, but forgot, and came home with my Aunt Raymond.’

‘A day such as this has been to you no doubt causes a great deal of forgetfulness,’ said he rather bitterly, and he could scarcely tear his eyes away from the convent to bestow a glance on her. Olive thought him very disagreeable, and did not see that she was bound to speak again. She wondered why he had come.

‘I suppose Lady Brooke will not be long,’ said he presently. ‘She invited me to dine here and go to the soirée with her—that is why I am here now.’

Olive bowed. If he did not see the bow, that was not her fault. He sighed heavily. Then she remembered the roses, and how hurt he had been about her parting with them. She

felt rather penitent, and looked round the room for the remainder of his bouquet. She went to the table where it was, added a few touches to the arrangement which had been made by the servant during her absence, and then she showed Sir John how pretty it looked ; but all he said was, 'It is a great pity that you had not the whole lot of those roses at the bazaar with you.'

'I told you I was sorry I had sold those I had,' said she;—'that it was not quite my doing——'

'You might have made at least thirty pounds if you had had these too,' he added.

Olive felt that she had heard enough about these roses, and really she had been stimulated to sell them quite as much by Mrs. Bertie Warrington's spiteful remark as by any desire to make money. Besides, she had already apologised to him. She put the glass down and retreated to a distant window, and then he saw that she was angry. He was angry too—and yet he wished to set this straight ; but he was afraid to speak to her, lest, in his present state of irritation, he should say something

which would make things worse. So he stood looking out of the front drawing-room window, and she out of the back. After about ten minutes of this, Sir John approached Olive's window and said, 'Lady Brooke does not seem to be coming.'

'No; I wish she would, for your sake as well as mine.'

He came a step nearer, but suddenly stopped short and said, 'May I write a note here? You will excuse me, I am sure—you don't seem inclined to talk.'

'I am willing to talk about everything but yellow roses—I said I was sorry I had sold them, and still you reproach me.'

He began to speak, said something in an excited manner which Olive did not hear, and then went to the writing-table and took pen, ink, and paper, but was slow to do more. He sat for some time, pen in hand, looking at Olive, who thought it very stupid of him not to be able to get on with his note at once. At last he made a dash at the paper, and then it was soon covered. He folded it with a firm touch, put it in an envelope with an air of extreme

decision, addressed it after another long look at Olive, and just as he had done that, Lady Brooke's maid came to say that her mistress had come home, and was dressing with all speed. The dinner was rather dull; all were tired or out of spirits.

The soirée was as pretty and interesting as it always is, but Olive was much too tired to enjoy it thoroughly. To her the pictures were little more than an unrestful background to a splendidly dressed and perpetually moving crowd. The brilliant lights and shifting colours confused her, the portraits on the wall blended strangely with the people who came to see them, and the picture of the scene which she carried away in her mind's eye was little else than a kaleidoscopic jumble made up of sheeny silks which flashed strange lights, of sparkling jewels, blue ribbons and stars, and gay uniforms which even an inch of dust could not tone down to sobriety. Mr. Willoughby was there, and looked sulkily mindful of Olive's bad behaviour to him. If he had approached her, she would, in spite of her mother's injunctions, have done her best to efface the unpleasant

impression it must have made on him, but he did not give her the opportunity. Mr. Ardrossan was there, and bowed very low when he saw Olive; but Sir John, who followed her like a shadow, seemed to bar his approach, and the crowd separated them. Very few pictures printed themselves on Olive's mind. The dragons were not terrible enough to alarm her—the distressed maidens who awaited their approach, not beautiful enough to excite her sympathy. The picture of the year was the interior of Blue-Beard's conservatory of departed wives, and most of the beauties of the day—Mrs. Bertie Warrington amongst the number—were depicted hanging to large hooks by their back hair. Some connoisseurs, however, gave the palm to 'Allerleirauh,' whose mantle was most exquisitely painted. A long quotation from Grimm explained the motive of the picture. Allerleirauh was a beautiful princess, who, in order to postpone her marriage *sine die*, insisted that the fur and feathers of a thousand different species of beasts and birds should be gathered together and worked into a mantle for her. The thousand different tex-

tures of the garment were rendered with most admirable fidelity, and there was a constant buzz of delighted amazement before this picture.

Olive's eyes strayed away from these garish glories to a smaller picture which was placed just above. A bit of blue sky and an ash-bough drooping down to a river bed with quiet grey stones in it, made her wish that the peacock's eyes of this mythical lady's mantle were not so bright, or the red of her hair not so pronounced ; for, whether this landscape was well or ill painted, she felt a pleasure in looking at it. The artist had done his best to realise a scene like ever so many that she remembered, with little thought, perhaps, of the fantastic juxtaposition which his work was destined to suffer.

A block occurred. One or two vigorous technicalities which met her ear showed that the crowd was not entirely composed of non-workers or of sympathetic amateurs ; and if she had been at all acquainted with the language of the studio, she might have gathered what some of the painter's brethren, at all

events, thought of the picture which interested her.

‘He’s got a deal of good stuff into that picture,’ said a gentleman with a long waving brown beard.

‘H’m! Far too much!’ muttered another. ‘He was at it down there last autumn. He wants breadth sadly, to my mind.’

‘I saw him there too,’ said a third; ‘I told him at the time he was getting it as tight as a drum!’

‘Tight!’ exclaimed a fourth. ‘No, the brush-work’s good enough. Mind, that foxy thing below plays the very mischief with its tone. It will look all right when it comes out. Has old Gregson got it?’

‘No, he has bought those herring-boats. He said he was short of marines.’

‘Ardrossan is turning a very good buyer, but he is using up his wall-space far too fast.’ The speaker turned round, and encountered Mr. Ardrossan’s fixed gaze. He had come to look at Olive’s picture. Faintly disconcerted, the artist and his friends moved away; and just as Mr. Ardrossan was saying a few words to

Olive, and she was waiting an opportunity to ask him some questions about the landscape she liked so much, Sir John Ellerton came up and broke off the conversation by saying, 'Miss Brooke, I am sent by Lady Brooke: she is in the supper-room, and wishes you to join her. Will you take my arm?'

Olive was very sorry he had not waited five minutes longer. She wished Mr. Ardrössan had been the one to offer his arm. Sir John was never much of a companion, and to-night he was duller than usual.

The first thing which met Olive's sight when she returned home from Burlington House was a note from Sir John to herself lying on the hall table with the other letters. He had laid it there as he went out. She felt vexed when she saw it; she did not care for him enough to enjoy a quarrel with him, and this, no doubt, was a continuation of the great yellow-rose dispute, or perhaps apologies for what had already occurred.

'For you, Olive,' said Lady Brooke suspiciously, as they went upstairs together.

'Yes, for me, but I am sure I don't want

it. What can he have to write about? he only left us twenty minutes since, and dreadfully tiresome he has been!’ Olive opened the note listlessly, but soon uttered a cry of surprise—it was an offer of marriage as well as an apology. ‘What a nuisance!’ she cried, as she tossed it across the table to Lady Brooke. ‘How can he be so stupid?’

‘My dear child,’ cried Lady Brooke warmly, ‘with all my heart I congratulate you on having won the love of a very good and honourable man! I have seen this coming for some time, and it has made me very happy.’

Olive looked rueful. ‘What am I to do about it?’

‘Oh, nothing to-night, of course. You have had a long tiring day; don’t let this prevent your sleeping.’

‘But it will. I shall be thinking all night long how to say no civilly.’

‘Say no!’ cried Lady Brooke; ‘I never heard of such folly! How can you say no?’

‘I do not want to say yes.’

‘But it would be madness to say no.’

‘Would it? I am very sorry—but why madness, if it is what I wish to say?’

‘Do you not love him?’

‘Love him!—of course not!’

‘You don’t dislike him?’

‘By no means—I am indifferent—I have no particular feeling of any kind about him, except when he is as disagreeable as he was to-day.’

‘Ah, I see,’ said Lady Brooke. ‘He has been too precipitate—that’s all—for, no girl in her senses could be indifferent to what he offers you. Think what he offers you, and what a kind rich husband he would be! You would spend your life in perfect happiness.’

‘But I am quite happy now without him.’

‘I dare say you are—most people would be so—but how long do you expect your present life to last? A very short time, I should say, if you look on things properly. Let me advise you not to count on much more of it; but we won’t talk of that now: the thing to settle is what kind of an answer to give Sir John. I think, myself, that he has been in too great a hurry; but I dare say your little quarrel to-day is partly to blame for that. Answer a few

questions, Olive—you have no invincible dislike to him?’

‘Certainly not. As a mere friend I rather like him, but that is all. I know I shall never do more.’

‘How can you tell?’

‘I am certain I shall not.’

‘Then, I am certain you will like him a great deal more—quite certain; and, at any rate, there can be no harm in trying.’

‘What is the use of trying? I know I never shall.’

‘Olive, I must know better than you. It would be very wrong not to try. Let me answer Sir John. Let me tell him that he has been too precipitate—that you have no feeling with regard to him which would permit you to accept him now. Let me beg him to continue on his old footing of friendliness, and not to say another word about this until I give him a hint that he may. You yourself can tell me when I may do that.’

‘And if I never tell you to give him this hint, nothing more will be said?’ exclaimed Olive, who felt that, if the matter could be

thus arranged, she was slipping very agreeably out of a disagreeable situation.

‘Exactly,’ replied Lady Brooke. ‘But, Olive, you must marry some one, and I do not see how you could find anyone half so good and kind and handsome as poor Sir John. And now go to bed. It is two o’clock; you had better have a long rest in the morning. If you are up in time for Mrs. Beauchamp’s luncheon, that is quite enough; that you must be.’

‘You must marry some one,’ repeated Olive to herself, as she went upstairs. ‘I wonder whether that is true. How odd it sounds!’ Well, even if it were certain that she must marry some one, she did not believe she should ever marry Sir John; but she was too utterly weary to care much about that or anything, and fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

Lady Brooke was astir betimes, and off to Lady Ellerton’s house in Wilton Place. She saw both mother and son. She told Sir John all that she had said she would tell him, and just a little more; for she allowed him to be-

lieve that Olive was, on the whole, very well disposed to his suit, but not prepared to pledge herself for life on so short an acquaintance. 'She must see more of you,' said Lady Brooke. 'She must see you more intimately, and get to know how good and kind you are, and how safe it would be for her to entrust her happiness to your keeping; then I am sure she would say yes, and be as happy when she had done so as either you or I could wish.' Lady Brooke had, as usual, a scheme, and was, as usual, entirely successful.

'You think I may hope a little?'

'I think you might hope a great deal, if she knew you better. I must try to arrange to throw you together more unrestrainedly—but I am sure I don't know how to do it. We are never alone in London; or, if such a thing does occur for once, one happy day drives another into the background. Let me see—how difficult every thing is! This is July—the very end of July—my sister, Mrs. Ullathorne, will probably return in the autumn, and then we shall have to go to India.'

This was the first time Lady Brooke had

ever fixed a date for her return, and Sir John had doubtless often heard her talk in a very different strain; but a lover's heart is always open to alarms, and India is so very far away.

'Oh, don't fix any time for your return!' cried he.

'And could you not spend a month or two with us in Scotland?' said Lady Ellerton. 'We go down there in ten days—at least, I do, for I am afraid my son will not go unless you do.'

This was the very thing Lady Brooke was pining to do. She was for the moment weary of London and its fatigues, and longing for coolness and rest and fresh air. 'It would be very nice—delightful! I must ask Olive.'

'You seem in as great bondage to Olive as I am to this big boy of mine,' exclaimed Lady Ellerton, looking tenderly at her handsome son.

'I think I won't be in bondage,' said Lady Brooke. 'Tell me when you would like us to come, and I will accept your kind invitation as freely as you give it.'

'We go on the 9th; we are forced to be there a day or two before the 12th. We shall

be delighted to receive you as soon after the 9th as you can come.'

'Oh, but have you a large party?' said Lady Brooke, who sincerely hoped they had.

'Oh no, some few friends are coming, but we will try to keep our numbers down; we will let the young folks have every opportunity of seeing each other.'

'And that is all that is required to make them happy in the way we wish,' ejaculated Lady Brooke fervently. 'She loves you already as a mother; I know she does.'

Olive's scruples were overruled. She said that, 'under the circumstances, it would be very disagreeable to be in the same house with Sir John, and be obliged to see so much of him.'

'I think it is his mother's house, and I do not see how anyone could have a stronger motive to pay a visit than you have now. He is a very kind, nice fellow, and has been extremely good to us. It would be frightfully bad conduct to refuse to pay this visit. He says that he hopes, when you know him better, you will like him more. You can't say, "I don't

want to know you better or like you more," for a refusal to go to Scotland would be tantamount to saying that.'

'But would it be so wrong, when I am certain it is of no use to go?'

Lady Brooke turned round with a light in her eyes which Olive had never seen before. 'Of course it would! Olive, I sometimes wonder at you.'

'It is not that I don't want to care for him, it is that I can't. If you allow me a choice, I should like to decline this visit.'

'I allow you no choice. Of course we go to Scotland. Our visit there does not in any way bind you to accept Sir John. It only amounts to this, that you have sufficient regard for my wishes to go to Invergrudie, and to do your best to see him in a favourable light when there—I insist on your doing that!'

'But then you will make him promise not to be always teasing me to marry him? He is not to say another word about it until I say he may.'

'Agreed,' said Lady Brooke.

CHAPTER XV.

The very place puts toys of desperation,
Without more motive, into every brain.—*Hamlet*.

INVERGRUDIE, Sir John Ellerton's shooting-lodge, was two miles from the head of one of the finest lochs on the west coast of Scotland—one which stretched in three long windings for nearly twenty miles from the sea. Olive had caught a glimpse of the loch from the top of the pass through which she was driving, and very spectral and forbidding the mountain ranges, sweeping down to the leaden-coloured water, with a straight grey line of cloud cutting off their summits, and a band of fading yellow sky below, had appeared to her. She had never seen a mountain, but had read many fine things about them, and was quite prepared to find them going straight up into the clouds—nay, even leaning over in places; but her first impression,

so far, was one of dreariness rather than of sublimity. Lady Brooke may have had the same feeling; for when the carriage stopped at the lodge-gate she exclaimed, 'I would rather see the inside of the Ellertons' house than all the tiresome mountains in the world!'

Sir John had heard the sound of wheels; he was waiting for his guests by the open door. Lady Ellerton received them most warmly, and after their long and tiring journey the prospect of rest seemed delicious. Lady Ellerton took them upstairs, and, having left Lady Brooke in the room which was to be hers, took Olive to one near it—the prettiest in the house, and said, 'I have chosen this for you, dear, because I fancied you would like the view from it. You must stay with us three months, and then I hope you will have learnt for yourself what a dear fellow my son is. He is rather shy and reserved, but when you know him, one of the most warm-hearted and honourable men living! Don't look frightened, dear—I shall not say another word on this subject; but you know what is the wish of my heart, as well as his.'

'But,' said Olive nervously—and tears

stood in her eyes as she spoke—‘if I find I can’t——’

Lady Ellerton kissed her kindly. ‘Dear child, it will be a great grief to me, but I shall still be the gainer by this visit.’ Lady Ellerton’s pretty courtesies made Olive feel quite happy.

Very eagerly indeed did she draw up the blind of her window next morning and look out. Beyond the garden and a fir-plantation stretched a level plain, with a few humpy hillocks and low bushes here and there, and patches of heather ; then came a thin line of intensely blue water, and over this rose a bare mass of mountain, shapeless and herbless, but bright and ruddy with the morning sun, which made every scar and furrow visible. One white fleck of mist was hovering in the ravine between it and its neighbour mountain, which was steeper, and seemed to assume more of the airs of chieftainship. Olive did not at first think much of their height, but gradually she began to make out, on the sides of the further mountain, the red stems of fir-trees ; she could trace fine threads of silver among its roughnesses of rock and stone ; and the smoke which


rose from a rude hovel at the foot of this silver-streaked wall made her feel that the element of size, at all events, was not wanting in the scene. She longed to see more, especially to see round that point which stopped the line of blue water.

For the first fortnight she had more opportunity of improving her acquaintance with Lady Ellerton than with her son. A large party had been asked to Invergrudie before Olive herself had been invited. These were principally gentlemen, and to them Sir John was obliged to devote himself. This did not seem to prevent him from being perfectly happy. He and they gave their whole minds to slaughter, and even when at home their thoughts ran almost entirely in that direction. Sometimes, when they were shooting or fishing in some manageable district where they could be approached by carriages, the ladies conveyed their luncheon to them; but, for the most part, they were absent until dinner-time, when they came home full of their day's sport and of other days which lay before them. Sir John Ellerton seemed another being. The truth, however,

was, that he was not quite so absorbed in the pleasures of sport as he appeared ; but he had received so many admonitions as to his behaviour to Olive, and had been obliged to give so many promises not even to hint at his affection for her until he received permission, that he was afraid to approach her even in the presence of others. He liked to think that she was staying in his house, and that he should have the pleasure of seeing her when he went home ; but as for talking to her, or doing anything to advance his suit, he dared not ; besides, he felt that his dear, quick-witted mother was sure to be working for him in his absence, and would manage everything a thousand times better for him than he could possibly do for himself. Olive seemed supremely happy, and his heart grew light as he saw it. She was never tired of roaming about the garden and grounds.

‘ You should join her sometimes,’ said Lady Ellerton.

‘ I can’t. You have forced me to make so many promises, that I feel as if I dared not say anything at all to her. I never seem to have



anything to say when I am with her now. If she would let things be settled as we wish, it would be quite different.'

'She is very fond of animals,' said his mother. 'Show her your dogs and horses, and let her see how fond they are of you—that would please her.'

Next day, in came Sir John with a very pretty pigeon in his hand—a shy-eyed, bright-necked, fluttering little creature, which cared for no caresses. Olive took it in her hand, but the longing to escape which she saw in the bird's eyes pained her. 'It is kind of you to bring this pretty creature to show me,' said she, 'but it makes it very miserable—may I open the window and let it go?'

'Oh no,' cried he, taking it from her and putting it into his pocket again; 'I am going to fly my falcon on the terrace; will you come and see it?'

'Yes,' was her answer; 'but what has the falcon to do with the pigeon?'

'Come and see. It is very pretty to see it strike it.'

Olive shuddered. 'But you don't deliver

over that poor frightened little thing to a great cruel falcon ?’

‘I must keep the falcon in practice,’ replied Sir John.


‘Tell me what you do.’

‘Oh no,’ cried Lady Ellerton, ‘don’t talk about it—I hate it too! The pigeon has no chance—I hate all unequal matches. Take it away, John—I wish you would get rid of that falcon.’

No more pigeons were brought to Olive, but she knew that they were immolated daily ; and she was not fond of men who spent the cream of their lives in shooting, and could not endure Sir John’s habit of calling the troops of pretty rabbits which she was constantly surprising, and which tossed up their heels and scampered off at her approach, ‘nasty vermin.’ Her ideal of perfect happiness was to dwell in some place like Invergrudie on terms of such close friendship with all living creatures that they should look on her as one of their best friends, and never dream of taking to flight when she surprised them. She wondered much at Sir John and his companions. They were

living in the most exquisite scenery—they never so much as thought of it apart from the shootable creatures which it harboured—mountains, moors, and lochs were simply growing-grounds for birds, beasts, and fishes, which did not flourish without these advantages. They went out early, came home late—so tired, too, that it was just as much as they could sometimes do to keep awake; but of what value was their day's work to anyone? What was their aim in life? Olive could discover none beyond a desire to get over their time pleasantly. Politics touched some of them a little; but only in the way of personal hatred of those who thought differently from themselves, for whom no execration was too deep. There were books at Invergrudie; but Sir John had read none of them, and if he lived to a hundred would read nothing but a sporting novel or newspaper. Whatever might be Olive's feeling with regard to Sir John, she was quite in love with his mother. She had admired her in London, but now she learnt to know her thoroughly. It was a daily delight to her to watch the pretty white-haired old lady fulfil the duties of her happy

country life with a grace and kindliness which added a charm to the most insignificant of them. She was so sweet-natured, and so necessary to the well-being of her whole household, that no event ever took place of which she was not the mainspring and centre. She was beloved by everyone in the house. Dogs, cats, birds, and horses were all dear friends of hers ; and though she sat so placidly with her knitting and embroidery in her hands that anyone might have said that she allowed nothing to distract her from her work but an occasional peep at a jagged edge of Ben Luichart which towered above the silver birches and pines of the park, these quiet mornings of Lady Ellerton's always brought good to some one near her. Olive loved her instinctively, and soon found herself telling all her thoughts to her. She talked to Lady Ellerton about Austerfield and Aunt Lettice, of her anxiety about her uncle's health, of her dread lest her father might not love her when he saw her, and of every other fear or fancy which agitated her heart. Nothing was kept back from her new friend except such things as related to Sir John, and Olive could



even have spoken of him to Lady Ellerton with far more ease than to her own mother. Lady Brooke was thoroughly comfortable at Invergrudie—a trifle dull ; but she was worn out by the gaieties of London and really required a rest, and she was enjoying one now which was perfect. She stayed in her own room until mid-day, and then, wrapped in a deliciously warm white shawl of Lady Ellerton's knitting, she seated herself in some pleasant corner in the garden. When Olive and Lady Ellerton had gone their little rounds of chicken-feeding and conservatory-visiting, they found her there looking soft and purring and velvety. She really looked very pretty ; her delicate colour was returning, her smooth brown hair lay softly on her temples, she spoke in tender cooing accents, and seemed to have settled down at Invergrudie for life.

It was many weeks before Sir John ventured to seek Olive's society except as it were by accident. Then he sometimes deserted his friends and joined her in her little walks. ' You are not dull here ? ' he said.

' Oh no, very happy. I never saw moun-

tains till I came here—how splendid they are, and how they grow on one !’

‘I never fancied you would be happy in a country place. No one who knew you in London could have imagined you would be. You thought of nothing but balls and parties from early morning till late night.’

‘I know,’ said Olive, rather ashamed ; ‘but it was my first season—I should tire of that.’

‘Nay, I don’t quarrel with you for it ; one must do something. I am sure I should be very dull in town if I did not go out so much ;—just as I should be dull here if I had no shooting ;—but you have nothing at all here, and that is why it is so good of you to seem so happy.’

‘Nothing here ! the place is beautiful. I could look at the lights upon those mountains for hours together !’

‘Oh, I am so glad ! If you like being here—we could always—but I am forgetting—’ said he, checking himself by a violent effort—‘we are not to talk about *that*.’

Olive liked him infinitely better at Invergrudie than she had ever done in London, but she, too, did not want to talk about *that*.

‘My mother has been telling me,’ he continued, ‘how fond you were of some country place where you stayed when you were a child—a very jolly place with a running stream through some meadows. I wish you would go a little walk with me—we have never had a walk together yet. I want to show you a stream we have here. It is really rather fine, and it’s a place you can’t see when you are driving.’

‘I should like very much to see it; but if we go, won’t they wonder where we are?’

‘Oh no, they will guess that we are out together, and that, you know, will please them, for they are awfully anxious that we should—oh, I beg your pardon; I am always forgetting! But let me show you the stream—they will know we are all right.’

Sir John’s blunders were very stupid; but, on the whole, Olive liked him rather better for them. They, at any rate, showed that his mind was so full of the one subject of herself and of his wish that she should care for him, that everything which was said led up to it with absolute certainty.

They left the grounds for their walk Sir

John was equipped for a day's shooting; and, as he led Olive across a rough bit of the moor, she could not help smiling at the contrast there was between herself and her big companion, and the Olive and Willie of other days. She was now dressed in a pretty white cambric—not even a crease ruffled its purity—her hat was a white straw with lace and primroses. The Olive of old used to be often rather dirty and dilapidated. She fell into the streams, or tore her frock, or got 'over her boot-tops' in the mud. The Olive of the present day was, as her maid would have said, 'much more conformable.'

It was the very day for a long walk. Her bright eyes brightened with pleasure at all she saw, and her pretty colour grew still prettier. Sir John strode on by her side with rich sun-burnt face. There was a look of faint anxiety in his intensely deep blue eyes.

'I know,' said he, 'that this river of ours is nothing very particular—not grand in any way, or the kind of thing to make the least bit of fuss about, but still I should like you to see it—you might admire it. Tell me what the

river you used to care about so much was like—I hope it was not bigger than ours.’

‘River!’ laughed Olive; ‘it was not a river at all! It was a common little running stream; but it went zig-zagging about the fields, and sometimes its banks were high, and sometimes they were low, and bits of them fell off and made islands, and you could stand on them, and it had fancies of its own, and at one time it would flow on tolerably quietly in a smooth brown current with something like shooting stars of gold in it, and at another it dashed quite fiercely against the stones that came in its way, and made the prettiest gurgling noises possible.’

‘Still,’ pleaded Sir John, ‘you don’t care so much for that stream and that country place where it was, that you could never let yourself be fond of any other?’

‘Certainly not! that would be absurd! Of course I could be fond of another, and many others—it is merely a pleasant recollection of a happy time when I was a child; I should have forgotten about the little village where it was, long ago, I dare say, if I had been to

other country places since; but I have not. I have been from home, of course, but only to horrible sea-side towns with crowded beaches—Ramsgate, and Brighton, and Margate.'

'How was Dr. Brooke when you last heard from him?' inquired Sir John.

'Oh, better! he is at home, but he has to be very careful. This illness of his is such a bad thing for him—he will lose his practice if it goes on.'

'I have been thinking,' said he, 'supposing that thing which we are not to talk about takes place—that all goes well, you know,' he added nervously, 'and you are some day mistress here—let me say it—it is for the sake of saying something about Dr. Brooke—this mountain air is the very best thing for doing good to people who are ill as he is, and he could come here whenever he liked, and go backwards and forwards to his patients sometimes—they would never know when he was away. You would like that, wouldn't you, if it cured him?'

Like that! Olive's love for her uncle was a passion—if coming here would restore his health—she was almost tempted to—she sighed at first, she could not speak—then she remem-

bered that she must not let Sir John indulge false hopes, and said, 'Please don't let us talk of that, Sir John.'

'Pardon me,' said he, 'I know I ought not, but I never liked any man more than I liked your uncle when I first saw him.' Olive looked at him as he said this, and thought she had never seen an honester and kinder face. They were walking along a wide rough road across the moor. The heather was bright with purple flowers, the air was light and exhilarating; it made Olive feel so buoyant and happy, that she could readily believe in its power of healing. 'What is that break in the grass and heather?' she asked after a while.

'That's the river! That's where we are going. It is a dangerous sort of place—you never know there is a river at all until you are on the bank just above it!'

That was true, but that was not the worst; for when you were on these banks you found that they were deeply undercut, and had a trick of falling. The channel of the river, which was some twenty feet below, was nearly choked up by masses of rock and earth which

had fallen. Through these a dark sluggish chocolate-coloured stream slowly wound its way, or lay in sullen and malignant-looking pools. Sometimes it was lost to view altogether, and once when Olive bent forward to try to trace it, she found it was stealing in a deep inky current under the very bit of bank on which she was standing. The bank was undercut, and the lower part of it thoroughly worn away by the deadly persistence of the stream. She started back terrified, and could have clung to Sir John for safety. He saw little cause for alarm. 'If we were to fall in!' said she, shuddering.

'It would be all over with us. These pools are tremendously deep, and then the banks are precipitous—no, a fellow would have a mighty poor chance who got in there!'

'But how grand the river is!' cried she. 'It is awful to see it stealthily eating at the very life of those rocks; and then, in the places where it has got its way and worked them out and made a deep bed for itself, how it swirls round and round, and seems to enjoy itself in horrible, cruel delight!' Olive was fascinated.

‘Do you like it?’ he asked.

‘Like it! Oh no,’ cried she. ‘It is a fine sight, but so awful, I can hardly bear to look—I shall dream of this.’

‘Then I ought not to have brought you,’ said Sir John, afraid she would like Invergrudie less now that she knew of this treacherous enemy which lay so near it.

‘Oh no, thank you for bringing me—I owe a strange new sensation to you—but do look there!’

‘What is it?’ cried Sir John, afraid that she had become aware of yet another danger.

‘Look at those ferns—I’d give anything to get them, but it is quite impossible.’

One fern was much the same as another to Sir John, who said, ‘I dare say you will find lots of them nearer home.’

‘Oh no, it is a rare kind; I saw a picture of it in Sowerby last night, and thought then how I should like to find it myself.’

‘I’ll get it for you,’ he cried with great alacrity.

‘How? You are not going to try to get across the river. I could not think of

allowing you to climb down those rocks for me.'

'No one could do that!' he replied, smiling at her townish ignorance; 'besides, the water is often twenty feet deep! No, I am not going that way. Will you wait here till I run home? I'll soon get you as many plants of it as you like.'

Olive thought he was going round some other way. 'I'll wait,' she said; 'but I don't think I dare stay here; I shall be sucked into the river in spite of myself, if I do. It has such a strange fascination.'

'No, not here: come with me; I'll put you somewhere where you will be quite out of danger.' He was pleased to think that she felt safe while with him—he was very happy. He led her back to the road, and cut down a quantity of heather, with which he made a bright flowery throne for her. 'Now promise to sit there till I return, and not to go near the river.' That done, he ran off homewards. He was wonderfully quick, and soon disappeared. 'Poor fellow!' thought Olive, 'he does not mind taking a little trouble for me.' After some

time he returned with a long pole in his hand, but no ferns. 'But the ferns?' she exclaimed.

'I have not got them yet.'

'I thought you were going across some bridge. I have been expecting every instant to see you on the other side.'

'There is no bridge! That's not how I mean to do it.'

'Then, you hook them over with that pole,' said Olive; 'but I can't think how you mean to do it. You may poke them out of the ground with your pole, if it is long enough, but they will all fall into the river when you have done it.'

He laughed and said, 'Come and see how I get them, but you shall not go near the river's edge.' He took her throne in his arms, and put it down at a safe distance; he made her promise not to stir from it during his absence; then he went to the very edge of the bank, fixed his pole on a flat rock in the centre of the stream, and with one swinging leap he was high in mid-air, and when he descended he was across the river. Olive had never either seen

or dreamed of such a proceeding, but he was safe almost before she could scream. The ferns grew just under the edge of the opposite bank—he soon came back with some.

‘Supposing you had swerved, or slipped, and fallen in?’ said she, still unreconciled to the danger which he had incurred.

‘You would have been sorry for me, at any rate,’ said he tenderly. ‘But there was not the least danger—I did nothing that was not perfectly easy and safe—don’t fancy I did.’ He helped her to put the ferns in a bundle, and together they went home.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET



